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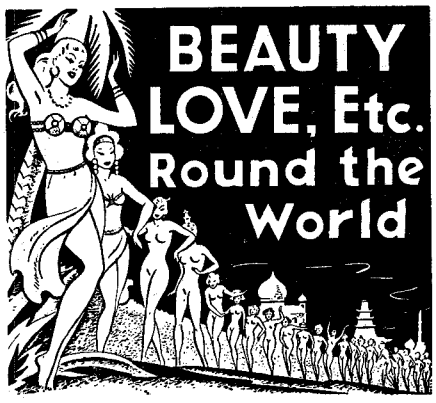


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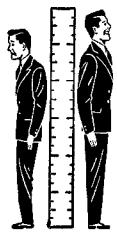

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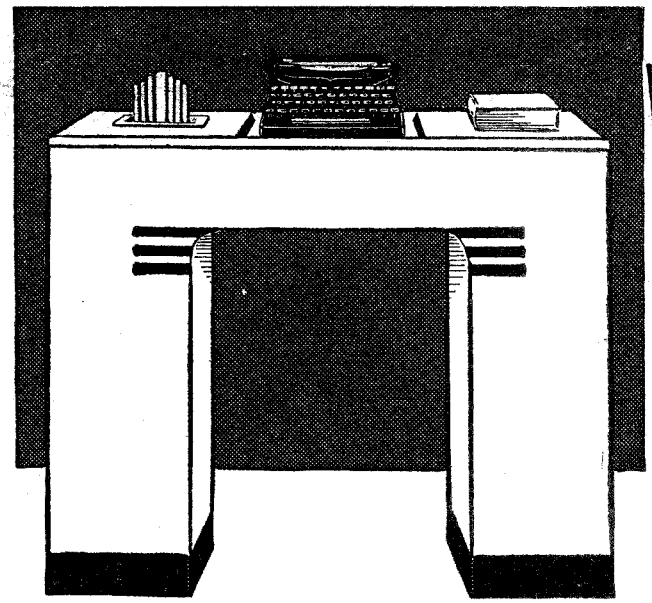

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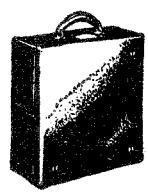

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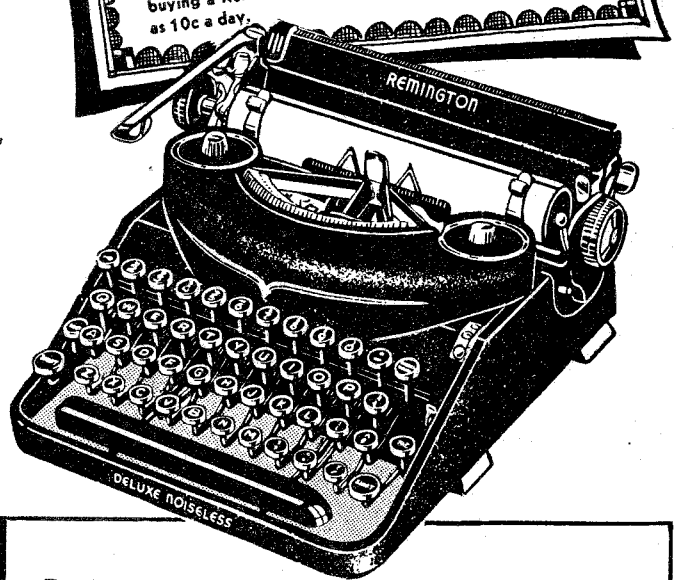


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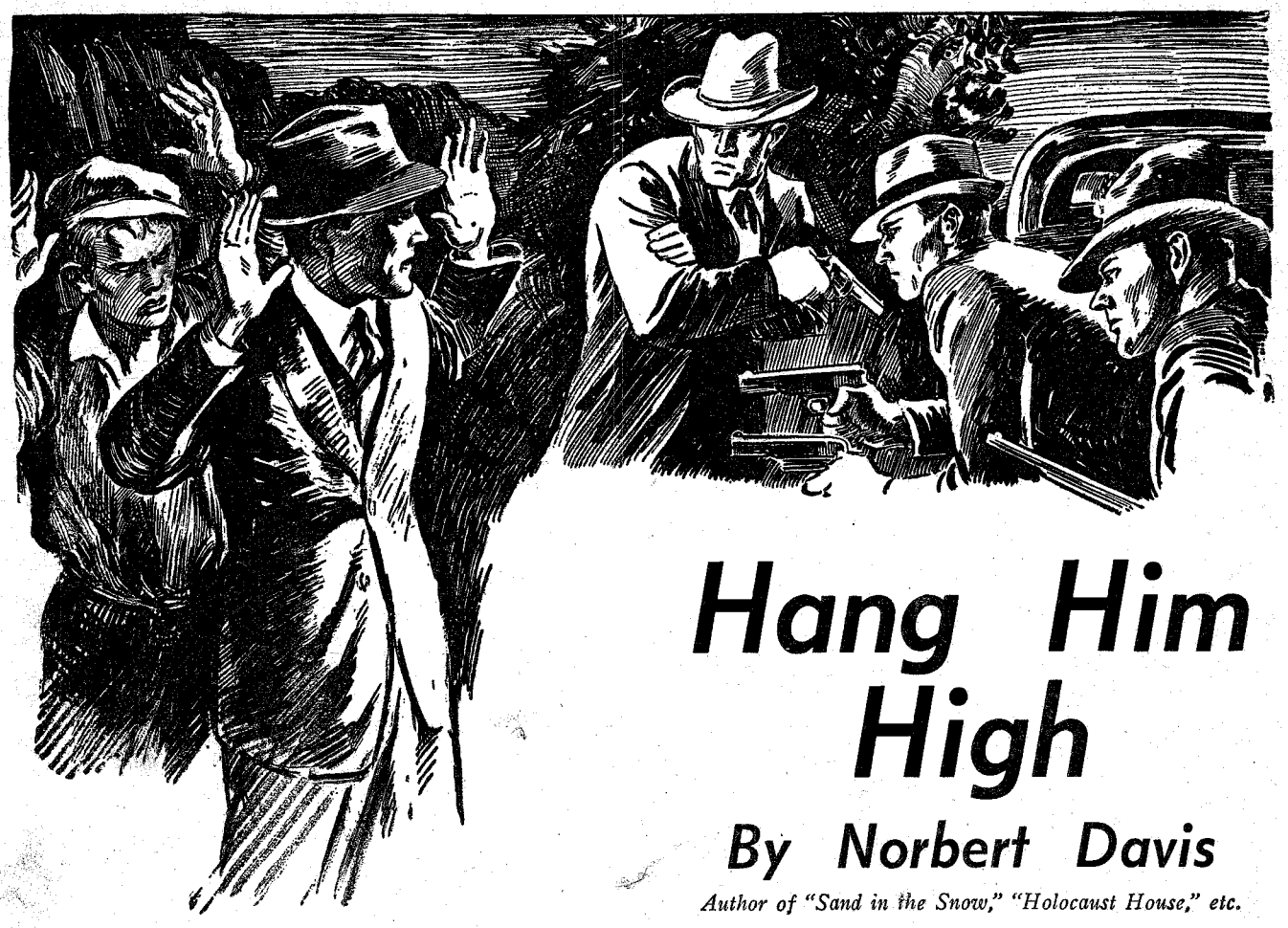

# Hang Him High

## By Norbert Davis

*Author of "Sand in the Snow," "Holocaust House," etc.*

**Jim Daniels is an old hand at crimes with lunatic trappings. So when he's bewildered, you've got something; you've got, *in fact*, a dude ranch nicely tricked out with a quite incredible Russian prince, a fugitive from a reform school, the dumbest blonde outside of Reno, several cowboys—and several dangling dead men**

### CHAPTER I

#### COUNSEL FOR THE DEFENSE

YARMOUTH was making his closing argument, but you wouldn't have known it unless you knew Yarmouth. He wasn't shouting or waving his arms. He was standing in front of the jury box, leaning his arms awkwardly on the railing, talking to the jury as confidentially as he would have to a group of personal friends.

"I'm not vindictive," said Yarmouth. "None of my actions or words during this trial have been the result of any personal spite or malice against this defendant. I am, if you want the truth, honestly sorry for him.

"But as the representative of the people in this case, I have my duty to do. As you, gentlemen of the jury, have *your* duty to do. My duty is to present the evidence to you in a fair and unprejudiced manner, and I have certainly done that. Your duty is to decide the fate of the defendant in the light of that evidence."

Yarmouth was a plain man—with emphasis on the plain. As common as an old shoe, that was Yarmouth. He wore a blue suit that was shiny at the seat and a stringy black tie that was jerked around under one ear. He brushed his colorless hair carefully to reveal the bald spot at the back of his head. He had a bland, innocent face. Yarmouth was your friend, your pal—if you were on a jury.

"You have a sense of duty," said Yarmouth. "Oh, I realize that. Or else you wouldn't be here making this sacrifice of your valuable time, neglecting your own personal affairs to take up the civic chores that your citizenship in this glorious commonwealth entails."

It was spring, and the feel of it was present even in the quietly dead air of the courtroom. Judge Fisher yawned behind his hand. He was a thin little man, shrunken under his black rustling robes, and the shadows made dark smears under his eyes.

Yarmouth was watching the jury out of the corners of his eyes. He decided that they looked as though they were sufficiently impressed with his opinion of their great intelligence and importance, and he got down to business.

"This defendant, Aloysius—alias Goochy—Callaghan, is charged with grand larceny, namely the theft of an automobile. A valuable automobile, gentlemen. You've heard the evidence I've offered to support that charge—evidence that shows that on the night of March 19th the owner of this car left it parked in front of his residence, as he was in the habit of doing.

"Note that, gentlemen. As he was in the habit of doing. It wasn't accidentally there at that time. It wasn't pure coincidence that the defendant happened to find it there when he decided to steal it. It was *always* there at that time, and I've shown the defendant knew it was.

"He regularly passed the owner's house when the car



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was parked in front. Stealing the car wasn't the whim of the moment on his part. It wasn't merely a youthful prank. There, in that last sentence of mine, is the danger point in this case. The very matter that is likely to mislead you. The age of the defendant. He *is* young. Yes. I admit that freely. You know it by looking at him."

The jury looked obediently.

IT DIDN'T bother Goochy Callaghan any. He was never troubled with shyness. He blinked blandly right back at them. He was an undersized youth with bat-like ears and a nose that was dented at the bridge. He had tow-colored hair that stuck up in clumps in spite of the layer of grease that covered it. His habitual expression was a cynically knowing leer, and traces of it remained even when he was trying to look the epitome of outraged innocence, as he was now.

"Certainly he's young," said Yarmouth. "But that doesn't excuse him. No! It makes his crime all the more horrible. Don't let your sympathy get the better part of your own good judgment.

"It is a matter of public knowledge that the most dangerous and vicious of our criminals are youths no older—if as old—as he is. Erase his years from your minds. Consider only his deeds. That will be difficult, I know. The defendant's attorney is a clever and learned man. He knows that the defendant's youth is his greatest talking point. He will emphasize it. He will play on your feelings, and he can do it. There is no man in this state more skillful at that than he is."

Jim Daniels, seated at the counsel table beside Goochy, indicated his thanks for the compliment with a politely ironical nod.

Daniels was a thin young man with an air of hard alert tension about him. His eyes were gray, intelligent and watchful under lowered lids. He was relaxed now, but he gave the impression that when he did move it would be with a quick, sure certainty, that he would drive straight to the goal he was aiming at with no lost emotion.

There was ambition in him—ambition that drove him ahead regardless of the risk or danger to himself. That was what made him so deadly as an opponent. He had no thought for himself—only for what he wanted to accomplish. He was an idealist, and an intelligent one.

James A. Daniels—Specialist in Criminal Law.

"I warn you," said Yarmouth to the jury. "The eminent counsel for the defense will use every oratorical trick that his clever and agile mind can conceive to blind you to the obvious in this case. I have presented evidence to show that the defendant knew the auto was there at that time every evening, that he was in the vicinity on the night in question just before the owner noticed the car was gone and reported its theft.

"Then, I have shown that when the car was subsequently found abandoned, there was evidence that the thief had tried to pick the lock on the glove compartment. Unable to do so, he had attempted to cut through the bottom of it, under the dash. Again he was unsuccessful, and this time he broke the blade of his knife and, in his guilty haste, *left it sticking in the material that covered the compartment!*"

Yarmouth paused, watching the jury again. He decided they were a pretty dopey bunch and that he had better repeat himself so they would be sure to get it.

"Left his knife blade sticking, broken off short, in the bottom of the glove compartment. That is vital. A person resembling the defendant was seen running away from the stolen car when a passerby paused to investigate. And then—*then*, gentlemen—when the police, recognizing the description as fitting the defendant, arrested him at his home, he still had in his pocket *the handle of the knife that fitted the broken blade left in the car!*"

Yarmouth studied them. They looked like it was sinking in, and he went on: "The defendant, of course, claimed an alibi. That is the customary cry of every felon. An alibi! And what an alibi! What was the defendant doing, as he claims? Sitting on the curb, he says, talking with a friend about a radio program!"

Yarmouth shook his head sadly. "A radio program! For five hours the defendant and his friend—he must be a very good friend, by the way—were sitting on the curb and talking about a radio program! Did anyone see them sitting there? Oh, no! And I might mention, just in passing, that I have shown that this friend of the defendant's—this very good friend—has a criminal record that includes five arrests for various crimes and breaches of the peace.

"That is all I have to say, gentlemen. The case is clear-cut. The evidence is before you, and I am confident that you will see that it proves beyond the faintest shadow of a doubt that the defendant is guilty as charged."

Yarmouth took out his handkerchief and wiped his forehead. He nodded at Judge Fisher and walked back to his chair and sat down with an audible sigh.

Judge Fisher looked at Daniels. "Counsel for the defense?"

DANIELS got up in one quick movement, as though he welcomed the chance to get into action. He was smiling a little, and he nodded once at the jury.

"I hate to disappoint my learned friend, but I have no intention of wasting your time or mine by trying to enlist your sympathies on the side of the defendant because of his youth. I'm interested solely in facts and not in emotions.

"Mr. Yarmouth has given you about as nice a summation of the case against the defendant as you could find in a day's walk. The summation was pretty sketchy, of course, but then so is the case against my client. Very sketchy, in fact.

"Let's take that case. Mr. Yarmouth says that the car was usually parked where it was when it was. What of it? It was parked in front of its owner's house. Can you think of a more normal place to park it? Did any of you ever park your car in front of your house?

"My client, says Mr. Yarmouth, knew the owner parked it there. Well, of course he did. He walked by there every day. It was on a direct route from downtown to his own house. So he had probably seen the car parked there lots of times. Does that prove he stole it? Of course not.

"What else has Mr. Yarmouth got? His witness saw someone who *resembled* my client running away from the abandoned car! Even Mr. Yarmouth—and he certainly worked hard at it—couldn't get his witness to say that it was my client he saw. No. The person running away just *resembled* my client. What utter nonsense! Every boy his age resembles my client more or less.

"But, imagine now, how clever a police force we have. A witness vaguely describes a person he saw running in the dark. Just vaguely, remember. Probably said he had two legs, two arms and a head. Did that baffle our ex-

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cellent police force? Were they in doubt? Oh, no! Immediately they go and arrest my client. Marvelous!

"Perhaps they consulted a fortune teller for all I know. But . . . they find proof. Oh, yes! Positive proof. What? A broken knife. In my client's pocket. That's a terrible thing, isn't it? My client was carrying a broken knife! That practically proves he's a murderer, according to Mr. Yarmouth, or it would if there was an unsolved murder lying around somewhere. Instead there was an unproved car theft, so it proves he stole the car. Bah!

"You've all been boys. You know that if a boy grows attached to a knife he'll carry it even if it is broken, providing he can't afford to buy another, as my client couldn't.

"But, you say, the broken blade found in the car fit the knife my client was carrying. Now I wonder if it did. Or do you suppose the police thought it would be a good idea if it did? That could be arranged, you know.

"Consider the case in view of that. There isn't any. Throw out that knife, and there isn't one thing to connect my client with the case. I wonder—and I think you as jurymen had better wonder—why there wasn't any fingerprint evidence offered by the prosecution? Why the police didn't find the knife until they got my client to the police station? How the police were so confident that my client was the guilty person when they didn't have anything resembling an identification of him?

"I'm not going so far, you understand, as to say that the police would actually frame a boy like my client to save themselves the trouble of going out and finding the real thief. I was just pointing out some discrepancies in the case to you—some mysterious discrepancies.

"My client has an alibi. There's nothing criminal in having an alibi, in spite of Mr. Yarmouth's insinuations to the contrary. He and his friend were talking about a radio program.

"What's so strange about that? They were both vitally interested in it. The program has been running for over a year, and they were ardent followers of its hero—a gentleman by the name of the Blue Ace. They were speculating on what was going to happen next, imagining what they would do if they were only the Blue Ace.

"Silly, you say? Remember, they're both only boys. And what's more, the gentlemen who write that program aren't silly, and that's just the effect they hope it will have on its listeners. To make them vitally interested in what happens to the Blue Ace and his various superhuman opponents.

"This whole case is nothing but the flimsiest nonsense. There's no evidence at all against the defendant that is worthy of the name—no evidence that couldn't have been manufactured in five minutes by our industrious police.

"They simply picked on the defendant because he was young and uninformed of his legal rights and had no resources to hire adequate counsel. The thing is a farce, and no intelligent person could consider it for five minutes without becoming aware of the stench that permeates it. I leave it in your hands to vindicate the defendant." Daniels walked back to his seat.

"BOY, oh boy!" Goochy murmured to him. "You can sure heave them old words around."

"Be quiet," Daniels said shortly.

Judge Fisher blinked at Yarmouth. "Rebuttal?"

Yarmouth yawned elaborately. "I don't consider it at all necessary in this case."

Judge Fisher rustled some papers in front of him and began to read his charge to the jury in a dry whispering monotone that was inaudible ten feet away. The jury had no slightest chance to hear him, and in any case they probably wouldn't have understood. It didn't take Fisher long. He had read the same charge at least a thousand times before, and he was expert at getting through it fast.

The jury filed out of its box, and a deputy tapped Goochy on the shoulder and led him through the door at the rear of the courtroom. Judge Fisher left his dais, and the few listless spectators began to straggle down the aisle toward the front doors.

Daniels yawned and stretched luxuriously. Yarmouth came over to the table and said: "It's men like you, Daniels, who make a farce of our system of criminal jurisprudence. You're a menace, nothing less. I'm thirsty. What say we go have a beer?"

Daniels nodded. "Good idea."

They went through the gate in the polished bronze railing and down the aisle and out into the main lower hall of the court-house. There was a noise here and bustle and confusion after the artificial stillness of the courtroom.

People scurried back and forth in an endless procession, and voices rose in a sort of a blurred hubbub. There were lawyers with shiny briefcases and politicians with stomachs and ward heelers with sly, cold eyes and dribbles of tobacco juice at the corners of their mouths.

Daniels and Yarmouth went out through the heavy bronze doors and down the long, wide flight of cement steps to the sidewalk. They turned to the left and walked up to the corner of State Street and waited there for the signal to change. The sun was bright and hot, and the grass in the municipal park across the street looked like a smooth vivid green carpet.

"Daniels! You, Daniels! Wait!"

Daniels and Yarmouth turned around. A man hurried down the courthouse steps and walked toward them, his heels grinding hard on the sidewalk. He was a big man with grayish fishy eyes that were set too close together in the beefy redness of his face. He was a detective, and his name was Hegan. He had testified against Goochy in the case that had just been closed. He came up close to Daniels and glared at him, his lips drawn into a thin, tight line.

"I been waitin' for you."

"Have you?" Daniels asked indifferently.

"You're damned right. When you were cross-questionin' me and in your closin' speech you claimed I framed that brat you're defendin'. That's a lie! You hear me? I never framed nobody in my life!"

"Is that so?" Daniels said, interested. "Then you're the first detective I ever heard of that didn't. You'd better go hire yourself out as a museum exhibit."

Hegan came one step closer. "You can get away with that smart stuff in court maybe, you damned shyster, but we ain't in court right now. I'll—"

"Go take a walk for yourself, stupid," Yarmouth said in a bored voice.

Hegan swung around. "Huh?"

"You heard me. Beat it."

"Oh," said Hegan, his fishy eyes narrowing suddenly. "So you're a pal of his, are you? So that's it! So maybe you two got together—"

"Go ahead," Yarmouth invited gently. "We're still listening."

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Hegan's breath made a whistling sound in his flat nostrils. "All right. You swing plenty of weight around here. You don't have to tell me. But that kid's guilty, and both of you know damned well he is! And I didn't frame him!"

"You sure as hell didn't do a very good job of it," Yarmouth agreed.

Hegan swallowed hard. "Yeah! And you sittin' there like a bump on a log and lettin' this guy make a monkey out of the police force. What's the idea of that? How we gonna get any place if every time we pinch somebody, dopes like you guys in the D. A.'s office sit there and twiddle your thumbs instead of tryin' to convict 'em?"

"Why don't you get some evidence once in a while before you pinch somebody?" Yarmouth demanded. "Evidence. Go look it up in the dictionary. And start now."

"You ain't heard the last of this," Hegan warned. "If that kid gets out of this rap you'll be damned sorry. Both of you'll be damned sorry. You wait."

"Not here," said Yarmouth. "Come on, Daniels."

## CHAPTER II

### THE DEVIL'S BACK YARD

THEY went across the street, leaving Hegan red-faced in the center of a curious knot of spectators. Yarmouth was whistling softly to himself. They went into the King's Bench Tavern halfway along in the next block.

It was one long low room, the artificially-aged beams across its ceiling gleaming in the shadowy light. The murmur of confidential voices blended in with the clink of glassware, and the sour-fresh smell of beer lay heavy in the air. There were high-backed booths in a row along the wall.

Yarmouth and Daniels sat down in one of them, and Yarmouth said to the waiter: "Two lager beers—big ones."

The beer came in big silvered tankards with the moisture clouded cool on their outsides. Yarmouth took a swig of his and smacked his lips.

"You know," he said thoughtfully, "the older I get the harder it is for me to believe that crime doesn't pay. With dopes like Hegan on the other side of the fence, it seems to me that a smart guy could make quite a lucrative career of it."

"If you kept away from the federal law," Daniels said.

Yarmouth nodded. "Yeah. The F. B. I. and the rest of them aren't so bad. They've got a lot more education and a lot more training for their job than most crooks have. They can recognize evidence when they see it. That's the why of their record of convictions.

"Most cops don't know any more about evidence than they do about raising ducks. Daniels, you've got this case in the bag unless the jury goes nuts, but that kid's guilty."

"No," said Daniels flatly.

"Oh yes, he is. And Hegan didn't frame him either. He wouldn't be yipping so loud if he had."

"I didn't say anyone framed him."

"No," Yarmouth admitted. "Not directly. But you certainly put the idea over. Oh, I don't blame you. I'd have taken the same line. But you know as well as I do that this kid Goochy has been in the juvenile court about ten times for everything from truancy on up."

"Maybe. That doesn't make him guilty this time."

"I talked to him. He's a tough little rat."

"Sure," Daniels said. "That's why the police jumped him for this deal. Certainly he's tough. He has to be. Do you know where he comes from?"

"Yeah. Down in the slums. The Devil's Back Yard district."

"Ever been down there?"

"Once or twice."

"I was born and raised there."

Yarmouth looked up quickly. "I didn't know that."

"It's true. That's why I know what I'm talking about. You don't live, if you're a kid, down in that district. You just exist. And you have to be tough to do that. Goochy is a little tougher than average. He goes around with a chip on his shoulder. That's why the cops pick on him whenever anything happens they can't find the answer for right away. That kid has the makings of something, Yarmouth."

"Something nasty," Yarmouth agreed.

"It could be, yes. But it could be something decent, too. He's just never had a chance. If I can possibly do it I'm going to see that he gets one."

"He stole that car."

"He did not."

"Okay, okay," said Yarmouth. He took another big swallow of beer. "So that's where you came from—the Devil's Back Yard. You've come a long way, Daniels."

"Not far enough . . . yet," said Daniels.

"I'm not playing stooge for that lush who calls himself the district attorney for the rest of my life either. You know, I've been thinking. That dope of a Hegan gave me an idea. About us getting together."

"And doing what?" Daniels asked.

"Politics," said Yarmouth. "I can pull votes, Daniels. I know. I can put a patch on my pants and muss my hair up and get up and limp around on the platform like I had corns and talk through my nose. That fools the suckers every time. They think I'm such a dope I must be honest on account I'm not smart enough to be crooked."

Daniels smiled. "Where do I fit in?"

"Money," said Yarmouth.

Daniels set his tankard down on the table with a sudden hard click, and his lips thinned against his teeth.

YARMOUTH held up his hand. "Oh, I know, I know. You're damned touchy about your wife's dough. I wasn't talking about that. But you can pull in the carriage trade—for me. You've got the front to do it, if you stop this fooling around with penny-ante criminal cases. I'll get the votes and you get the dough. You can name your own price."

Daniels shook his head slowly. "No."

"What *do* you want then?"

"It's hard to put into words without making myself sound like a fool, but it's something in me and I've got to follow it the best I can. It's the penny-ante stuff, as you call it. It's helping people like Goochy—not only the kids, but all the little guys that never get a fair shake. Take the case against Goochy. Look how you prepared it."

Yarmouth shrugged. "How the hell did I know a slicker like you was going to show up on the other side? The case was plenty heavy enough to get by ordinarily."

"Certainly!" Daniels said. "That's what I'm talking about. What would have happened ordinarily? Fisher would have assigned Goochy's defense to some kid who didn't know anything, had never studied the case, and didn't give a damn one way or the other. And right now Goochy would be on his way to the pen."

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"Where he belongs," Yarmouth agreed. "You haven't won this case yet, you know."

"If I don't, I'll appeal."

"Oh, hell," Yarmouth said helplessly.

"That's it," Daniels said earnestly. "Goochy is a little guy. He's unimportant. He has no money. But does that matter? Why doesn't the little guy have just as many rights as the big shot?"

"You've got me there, pal," Yarmouth said. "He doesn't, though, and never has had. You think you're going to change that?"

"I'm going to try."

"You're a damned fool," said Yarmouth. "But here's luck to you." He raised his tankard in a salute. "And if I get in your way while you're doing it, just blow your horn. I don't want to be in front of you when you mean business. I think you could be kind of a tough number, Daniels."

"I learned to be—a long time ago," said Daniels with a bitter twist to his lips.

A bailiff came wandering along the line of booths, peering into each one as he passed. He stopped beside Daniels' and Yarmouth's table.

"Your jury's comin' in."

Yarmouth nodded. "Thanks." He stood up. "Daniels, I'll bet with you on the verdict if you'll give me ten to one."

"No, thanks," said Daniels.

They went out of the tavern and crossed the street to the courthouse. They were hurrying up the long flight of steps when there was a sudden squeal of tires from behind them, and a foggy voice shouted:

"Oh, Jim! Boss! Wait a minute!"

It was Plunk Graham, Daniels' assistant, secretary, office manager and general all-around majordomo. He was a squat, bow-legged young man who wore thick horn-rimmed glasses that gave him an expression of owlish, startled wonder. He came puffing breathlessly up the steps.

"Boss! Wait a minute. I got an im-important communication from your wife—"

"Later," said Daniels. "I'm busy now."

"But she said this was—"

"Later, later," Daniels said impatiently. He was going on up the steps. "Wait for me."

"Well," said Plunk fatalistically. "She's *your* wife."

THE courtroom was as quiet as when Yarmouth and Daniels had left it. A guard was nodding sleepily beside the door. The jury filed back into its box and sat there looking impressed with their own importance. The deputy brought Goochy back in, and he sat down beside Daniels at the counsel table. Judge Fisher came in and took his seat, and the court was called to order.

"You gentlemen have reached a decision in this case?" Judge Fisher asked in his soft, tired voice.

The foreman stood up and cleared his throat twice. "We have, Your Honor."

"And what is your decision?"

"We find the defendant not guilty."

Judge Fisher nodded, not a bit surprised. "The verdict is so entered. Defendant dismissed." He got up and left the room.

The jury still sat in their box, looking at each other and wondering what next. No one paid any attention to them.

Yarmouth came over to Daniels' table. "Well, it was a good bet anyway, at ten to one. Juries are all screwy, I think." He nodded meaningly at Goochy. "I'll be seeing you again, sonny. Next time we'll park you in a nice cool cell for a few years."

"I laugh heartily," said Goochy, leering at him. "Better dust off your brains first. My mouthpiece could give away fifty pounds and sink you in two rounds fightin' blindfolded. Blow yourself away, chump."

"Nice kid," Yarmouth said to Daniels. "Polite and courteous. If you're planning on keeping him around, you'd better chain your pocketbook down." He nodded again at Daniels and went down the aisle and out the front door of the courtroom.

Daniels began to gather up the papers in front of him and pack them away in his briefcase.

"How much, pal?" Goochy asked.

"How much what?" Daniels asked absently.

"How much I owe you for the fix in this case? You name it and I'll go out and clout a car tonight and pay you tomorrow."

Daniels looked up suddenly. "You said—what?"

"A car, a car," said Goochy. "I'll go out and knock off a buggy and strip it. And don't get ants. I got the system. No dopey slips like on this job."

Daniels sat down slowly. "You—stole the car? The one you were accused of stealing?"

"Well, sure," said Goochy. "What do you think?"

"You swore to me that you didn't. You told me that you were innocent, that the police had framed that knife on you."

"That knife," said Goochy. "Was I a stupe! Carryin' it right in my pocket after I busted it in the car! Gravy-brains, that's me. Sure I told you I was framed. Am I so nuts I should go around telling people I'm guilty? Now you're a good guy, I guess, but you know yourself you can't trust no mouthpiece. They'll sell you out for a bag of beans."

DANIELS sat there silently, looking at him. Goochy spread his hands. "You didn't think I was really innocent, did you?"

"I'm afraid I was sucker enough to think just that," Daniels admitted.

"Hah!" said Goochy. "The guy is cracked! Look. How was I gonna pay you for the fix if I couldn't go out and clout a car or bust a jewelry store window or something?"

"I didn't expect to be paid."

"Throw me another fish," Goochy said skeptically. "A mouthpiece that ain't got a hand out? I laugh. There ain't no such animal. What did you expect, maybe?"

"Nothing. I just wanted to help you."

"He wants to help me," said Goochy. "I'll die laughing. Look, dope, I don't need no help, see? I get along, I get along."

"I guess you do," said Daniels.

"Look," said Goochy. "I'm no stingeroo. You're a smart mouthpiece. You got the words to set 'em up and knock 'em down again. Sure, I can use you. Plenty. I got a future. But I ain't no charity case."

"A future," said Daniels. "What?"

Goochy winked at him elaborately. "Dickey Hale."

"What's that?" Daniels asked sharply.

"Sure," said Goochy triumphantly. "Sure, sure. That sets you up, hey? Thought I was just a dumb punk,

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didn't you? I guess you heard of Dickey Hale, all right, ain't you?"

"Yes."

"I know him!"

"So do I."

"Aw!" said Goochy. "Come off it! Where'd you ever get to know him?"

"I went to school with him."

He had. The old public school on the edge of the Devil's Back Yard—a clump of ugly red buildings huddled together with the stains of soot streaked down their sides like giant finger smears.

Even then, in grammar school, Dickey Hale had the mark of what he was to become on him, written across his wizened young-old face like printing for anyone wise enough to read. He was undersized and puny, but he had a warped streak of viciousness in him, that when he was crossed, exploded into a frenzy of ruthless uncaring savagery. Even boys twice his size and weight steered clear of him after one experience with that.

Dickey Hale was a killer. It was born in him in the same way it is born into a king cobra to be poisonous. Whatever else he was now—kidnaper, bank robber, hijacker and public enemy—he remained first and always a murderer.

He hadn't lasted long at public school. He had completed his education in the gray confines of a reformatory. But Daniels could still remember his white, set face with the lips twisted back thinly from broken teeth.

"You seen him lately?" Goochy asked eagerly.

Daniels shook his head. "Not for a long time. I don't think he'd remember me."

"I seen him just last month," Goochy declared. "Hah! Get that? Them federal boy scouts is lookin' under every rock for him, and he turns up big as life right where he used to live when he was a kid! Sure, I seen him. Talked to him too."

"There's a heavy reward for him."

"Am I a stoolie, you think? Besides, anybody that peached on Dickey Hale would get himself tied up in a bag and dumped in the drink. He's tough, boy. He's plenty tough. He ain't afraid of nothing."

"Except of being afraid."

"Huh?" Goochy said blankly. "What kind of double-talk is that?"

"Never mind. You stole that car you were accused of stealing. Then your friend Hank Dooley perjured himself when he swore that he and you were talking about a radio program at the time?"

"Sure, sure. I'll do the same for him some time."

"I see," said Daniels.

## CHAPTER III

### YOUR WIFE WENT WEST

HE HAD been taken in completely. He had let his sympathy run away with his judgment. In spite of all his training and his experience, he had been a sucker. It was a bitter thought, but Daniels was too intelligent to try to dodge his own responsibility in the matter of getting angry at Goochy for doing what—to Goochy—was the perfectly natural thing to do.

"What did you steal the car for?" he asked. "Were you going to strip it?"

"Naw. I was practicin'."

"Practicing what?"

"Clouting cars. Look, like I told you, I talked to Dickey Hale when he was around. We're pals, we are. Like this." Goochy held up two fingers close together to illustrate. "So I say to him: 'How about givin' me a break, Dickey? How about lettin' me throw in with you and your boys?' So he says: 'Sure. Maybe when you grow up a little. Maybe I'll break you in as my driver. I need a good one.'

"So I start practicin', see? Dickey's no dope. He don't buy the cars he uses. He lifts one whenever he wants a ride, so I gotta know all about how to do it. I gotta know how to drive all kinds of cars. I'm gettin' good too. They ain't any car I can't walk off with, and I can slide through traffic like a greased eel."

"Driver for Dickey Hale," said Daniels slowly. "That's quite a career you're embarking on."

"Ain't it, though?" Goochy said proudly. "You're telling me something! I guess there's plenty of mugs, all right, that'd like the chance to toss in with a big shot like him."

"Oh, yes," said Daniels. "Plenty. Did you ever think of the other side of the picture, Goochy? Being hunted everywhere—running, hiding, sneaking? Never being able to relax, never being able to trust anyone? Always on the dodge, with every man's hand against you?"

"Phooey!" said Goochy contemptuously. "That sounds like the drool those mission dopes pass out to bums that have to listen to them to get some free soup. Dickey Hale don't do no runnin' unless he feels like it. Anybody makes a snoot at him, he makes a snoot right back with the old tommy gun."

"I see," said Daniels again. "Did you ever think of working, Goochy? Of getting a job? I don't mean just any job. I mean a good one—something in the technical line, perhaps. Something that's interesting—where you can do work you're proud of?"

"A job!" said Goochy. "Work, the guy says! Only boobs work, don't you know that?"

"No," said Daniels slowly. "I didn't know that."

"You know now," said Goochy. "Never mind. Everybody's gotta learn. How you can sling language around like you do and still be such a sap, I don't see, though. You should wise up to yourself—like me."

"Oh, yes," Daniels agreed absently.

He was wondering what to do now. It was through his efforts that Goochy was free to pursue his dubious ambitions. If Daniels hadn't interfered Goochy would almost certainly have been convicted. Yarmouth had the best record of convictions of any man in the district attorney's office. He didn't miss very often, and—but for Daniels—he wouldn't have missed this time.

Daniels hadn't thought much about the matter previously—hadn't had the time. But vaguely at the back of his mind he'd had the idea of seeing to it that Goochy was enrolled in some trade or technical school. But right now that didn't seem to be such a good answer.

PLUNK put his head in the front door of the courtroom, peered owlishly around through his thick glasses, finally spotted Daniels and came puffing importantly down the aisle. "Now listen, boss. This here is vital, and your wife said I had to get hold of you and tell you about it at once, if not sooner."

"All right," Daniels said. "What is it?"

Cora Sue, Daniels' wife, had an inexhaustible store of

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enthusiasm. Anything she happened to be doing at the moment always seemed to her to be vitally important, and Daniels expected that this time she had probably found something new and startling in the way of a hat or fur coat.

"First," said Plunk, "there's this." He handed Daniels a newspaper clipping.

Daniels scanned it casually and then suddenly jerked to rigid attention.

**NOBLEMAN CHARGED WITH MURDER**

**Reno, Nevada. May 1. Kermic Dak Hassan, Prince of Radizstan, a province of the former Holy Russian Empire, was arrested today by Sheriff Winters of Traphoe County and lodged in the county jail at Greek Flat, charged with the murder of Benjamin K. Gordon, prominent cattleman of Traphoe County.**

**Prince Dak Hassan, an exile since the advent of the Soviet government, is business manager of the Tumbling R dude ranch which is owned by his wife, the former Michelena Riley.**

**Gordon, the only son of Benjamin F. ("Old Ben") Gordon, was co-owner, with his father, of the G Bar G, the largest and oldest cattle spread in the state.**

"Cora Sue found that in the paper," Plunk explained. "She came down to the office hootin' and hollerin' and wavin' it around her head. She said you knew this here prince and his wife."

"Yes," Daniels said. "Isn't there any more than this? Is this all the paper printed?"

"Yup. Is this bird a real prince, Jim?"

Daniels shrugged. "He might be, for all I know. He says he is, but then he's the world's smoothest liar."

"You suppose he knocked this other gent off?"

"Probably. He's capable of it."

"That's tough," said Plunk. "Because Cora Sue called up the prince's wife from the office—she run up a fifty-dollar phone bill doin' it—and she tells this wife that you are going to come right out there hot-foot and shake the prince loose from the pokey."

"Go clear to Nevada?" Daniels said incredulously. "Now? I can't do that!"

"All right," Plunk said, shrugging. "But I'll bet you'll get lonesome for your wife if you don't."

Daniels stared. "She didn't—"

Plunk nodded slowly. "She did. I took her out to the airport just before I come down here."

Daniels swore to himself in a whisper.

Plunk said: "Cora Sue told me that it was all your fault, so you'd have to help."

"My fault!" Daniels echoed in amazement.

"Yup. Yours and Cora Sue's. She said you and her were the ones that made it possible for this Michelena Riley to marry the prince, who Cora Sue says is nothing but a rat, and now that you got her into this why then you got to get her out of it again. Is that true, Jim?"

"Well, yes, in a way," Daniels admitted.

"How'd you arrange it—the marriage, I mean?"

DANIELS stared blankly ahead of him, remembering. "Well, you see this Dak Hassan is a fortune hunter. That is, he was at the time. He's a slicker. He wanted to marry someone with a lot of money who could support him.

"He'd even made a few passes at Cora Sue, with his eye on her father's money. Michelena Riley didn't have any money at all—nothing but an old broken-down ranch. She was crazy about Dak Hassan, and she wanted to marry him. He borrowed some money from her and didn't pay it back, and I told him if he didn't marry her I'd have him jailed for petty theft."

"And he married her?"

"Yes."

"Boy!" said Plunk. "Some romance!"

"Michelena Riley is a swell person," Daniels said. "I couldn't see what she wanted that rat for, but she did, so I was going to see that she got him."

Plunk said: "But it don't look like she's gonna have him much longer."

Daniels hesitated, chewing on his lower lip. "Cora Sue is right," he said at last. "I'll have to go and do what I can—not for Dak Hassan, but for Michelena Riley."

"Hey," said Goochy. "Hey, chumps. Come out of the trance. I got some business to do. I can't stall around this dive all day."

"Who's this moth-eaten monkey?" Plunk asked, regarding Goochy with disfavor.

There was a cut-glass water pitcher on the counsel's table, and Goochy picked it up by the handle.

"Say it again, frog face. Go ahead, go ahead. Say it again and I'll cave in your skull."

"Put that down!" Daniels said sharply.

"You hear what he called me? You hear what he says with that blabber mouth of his?"

"Put it down!" Daniels repeated. "I just got you out of jail. Do you want to go back?"

"All right, all right," said Goochy, reluctantly replacing the water pitcher.

Daniels studied him with narrowed eyes. "Have you ever been out West, Goochy?"

"Naw. What's out there? What I want to go out there for?"

"There are deserts, mountains, ranches, cowboys. . . ."

"Cowboys!" said Goochy. "Cowboys! Hah! You mean them funny dopes that parade around in leather pants with cannons stuck in their belts? They kill me! You ain't standin' there with your face open and tryin' to kid me into thinkin' there really is any such guys as that outside of the movies, are you?"

"Yes. There are."

"Baloney!" said Goochy.

Daniels tried a new approach. "Did you ever do any cross-country driving, Goochy?"

"Cross country? Cross country? What's that?"

"Driving outside the city—on the highways."

"Oh, you mean out in the sticks? Where the apple knockers prowl around? Naw!"

"Well," said Daniels casually, "you ought to have some experience at it before you start driving for Dickey Hale. He does quite a lot of business with small-town banks. You may be good in traffic, but driving on the open road is something else again."

Goochy looked interested. "Is that a fact?"

"Oh, yes. Now I'm going to drive to Nevada. I'm going to go just like Dickey Hale would drive it—straight through, day and night. Would you like to go along and help me drive?"

"What's there in it for me?"

"Nothing. I'll charge it off against the money you owe me for defending you."

"Okay, okay," Goochy said. "I ain't got nothing important on right now. Sure, chum. It's a deal. What kind of a heap you got?"

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"Bentley-Thrum Special."

Goochy jumped. "Huh? You mean one of them twenty-thousand-dollar custom-built sport jobs?"

"Yes."

Goochy squinted. "Is it hot, chum? Did you hook it from some sucker?"

"No."

"Aw," said Goochy. "Come off, come off. You never picked up the price of one of them buggies frontin' for guys like me."

"It's my wife's car. She has—quite a lot of money of her own."

"Quite a lot, he says! Listen at him! Quite a lot! She must have a million, no less!"

"Her father has a hundred of them."

Goochy's mouth opened. "What? What's that? The old man's got a hundred million in his sock? And you go around workin' for your livin'? Are you goofy?"

"I sometimes think so," Daniels said.

## CHAPTER IV

### AROUND OLD GOBLIN

THE sound of the motor was a high, keening whine over the roar of the wind around the slanted, low windshield. The canvas top slapped and chattered against the struts, and the headlights made a long brilliant tunnel with the flowing white river of the concrete highway as a floor. Close on either side of the road, like darkly sullen watchers, were the knobbed, bleak outlines of hills.

Daniels was slumped in the right corner of the front seat, his hat brim pulled down low over his aching eyes. Goochy was humped up over the steering wheel like a jockey riding a horse.

"Don't this damned country never end?" he asked.

"Tired?" Daniels inquired hopefully.

"Naw, naw. Am I a sissy?"

Daniels relaxed again, sighing. He had taken Goochy along with him, first because he felt a responsibility for him, and secondly because he had hoped to give him such a concentrated and prolonged dose of driving that he would lose a little enthusiasm for his chosen career. The lesson didn't seem to be taking very well. Goochy was thoroughly enjoying himself, and his wiry body apparently carried an inexhaustible store of energy.

It was Daniels, instead of Goochy, who was getting mighty tired of driving. This was their second night on the road. The bullet-like car bellowed through a cut, hammered up the rise beyond, dropped breath-takingly down again.

"Hey!" said Goochy suddenly. "What's that?"

A road sign flipped by and was gone.

"It said, 'Cattle Crossing. Caution,' " Daniels told him.

"Huh? Cattle crossing? What's that mean?"

"It means you'd better watch your step. This is open range through here."

"What?" said Goochy. "What this you're sounding off? A range is something you cook stuff on."

"No," said Daniels wearily. "It means open country—not fenced."

"What's the cattle got to do with it?"

"They're in the open country."

Goochy froze. "What? What? You mean they let them milk factories wander around loose?"

"In some places."

"Why, it's a crime! It's against the law!"

"Not here. The road goes through some ranges. The cattle have to get back and forth across it."

"It ain't right," said Goochy stubbornly. "Are you sure you ain't just dreamin' this up, chum?"

"You won't think so if we run into a steer."

The car flipped up over a rise and down a long straightaway.

There were lights ahead. Two headlights pointed directly at them, and a third flicked wigwag fashion across the dark sky.

"Slow up!" Daniels ordered sharply.

THE engine sound died to a mutter. The wind whistled by eerily, buffeting at the top. Another light appeared, a red one that overlay the brilliance of the others like a blood-stained deep carpet.

"Cops!" Goochy exclaimed. "Hold your hat! I'm runnin' through 'em!"

Daniels kicked his foot off the accelerator. "Quit it, you fool! Stop the car!"

"All right, all right."

The long car coasted to a stop. The car ahead of them was pulled slant-wise, partially blocking the road. It was a new, heavy sedan, overlaid thickly with dust. A radio aerial made glistening parallel streaks across its top. The lights continued to glow on them, but there was no one in sight.

Goochy screwed the window down on his side and put his head out. "Come on, come on. What do you think you're doin', stupes? Playin' hide and seek?"

"Turn off your lights."

The voice had a quiet tone of authority. The man who had spoken was still invisible. Daniels clicked the switch on the dashboard. The lights of the other car were blinding now, shining directly through the low windshield into their faces.

"All right."

The man was right beside the car suddenly, on the driver's side. He was tall and heavy-set, his face shadowed under the brim of a dress sombrero. The light reflected from the polished leather of his puttees.

"Hah!" said Goochy. "A boy scout, no less! Done your good turn for today, sonny?"

The man was leaning in the car window, and Daniels pushed his own hat brim back to reveal his features. The man in the sombrero studied his face and Goochy's silently for a second.

"Police," he said at length, in the same quiet tone. "Highway patrol. Whose car is this?"

"It's registered in my wife's name," Daniels said. "Cora Sue Daniels—Crafton Beach. My name is James A. Daniels. I'm an attorney from Breel City. This is Aloysius Callaghan, my driver. He's also from Breel City. We're driving through to Nevada."

"Identification?"

Daniels produced his wallet from the inside pocket of his coat and handed it over. The officer found his driver's license and compared it with the registration card on the steering post and then nodded, satisfied.

"What are you carrying in the back?"

The back seat of the phaeton was covered with a tarpaulin fitted with snaps that closed it off into a dustproof compartment.

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"Just personal luggage," Daniels said, pulling up some of the snaps.

The officer produced a flashlight, flicked it under the tarpaulin. "Okay. You can go ahead now. If you see any cars stalled along the road, don't stop under any conditions. Don't pick up any hitch-hikers or other passengers. Just keep going. You'll be flagged down again fifty miles ahead. And after this, drive more slowly."

"WHAT'S that?" said Goochy, instantly belligerent. "What's that? Listen, we been crawlin' along like a turtle, obeyin' every speed law just like it was writ!"

"There's a curve around Old Goblin, the mountain back there," the officer said wearily. "When you go around it we can see your headlights from here. It's an even ten miles away. You got here from there in just under seven minutes."

"It's a frame!" Goochy shouted.

"Be quiet!" Daniels said impatiently. "Thank you, officer. I'll make him hold it down from here on. Is this barricade and inspection part of your regular patrol, or is there something special going on?"

"Mighty special. The bank over at Trail's End was held up today. We've got the boys pulled the job cornered somewhere inside this fifty-mile circle. We're closing it in a little at a time."

"A bank job!" said Goochy. "Hi-de-ho! You know who done it, chum?"

"The Dragan boys—Rex and Tully. They had some help. They hang out in Arkansas and Oklahoma usually. They're off their home grounds up here, and we're going to nail them before they can get back and hole up. We got one of the gang. We're hoping it's one of the Dragans, but we can't tell yet."

"Can't you look at his face?" Goochy asked.

"No. It was shot off."

"Oh," said Goochy, subdued.

Daniels said: "Aren't you taking a big chance, officer? Holding this road alone, I mean?"

"I'm not alone. Denny! They're okay."

Another man strolled into the light. He was stocky and short, and he was carrying a sub-machine gun casually slanted over his left arm.

"Ow!" said Goochy. "A chopper, no less!"

The stocky man nodded. "What kind of a car is this, mister?" he asked lazily. "Never seen one like it before."

"Custom-built Bentley-Thrum," Goochy said in a proud voice. "Twelve cylinders sealed engine, super-charged—five speeds forward—one special racing over-drive. She'll turn up a hundred and twenty-five miles an hour—" He stopped and added hastily: "At least that's what I hear she'll do."

"Yeah," said the stocky man skeptically. "You never tried it out, of course."

"Oh, no," said Goochy. "I'm great for this here safe driving. Believe me, it's the nuts!"

Daniels said: "We might as well shove along. Is there any place near here where we can get something to eat?"

"Yeah. At the junction of Highway 14—about twenty-five miles ahead. There's a restaurant and tourist camp there. You'll see the sign. It's a whopper. Remember, don't stop to help anyone or pick anyone up."

"We won't," Daniels said.

Goochy shifted gears and pulled the long phaeton around the touring car. The tone of the engine grew deeper as he accelerated, picked up the high whine of the super-charger.

"Wow!" he said. "A bank job! I betcha they got a million dollars!"

Daniels said: "And I'll bet the man with his face shot off doesn't care how much they got."

Goochy swallowed. "Yeah. Yeah, maybe you're right."

THE neon sign was, as the patrolman had said, a whopper. It was built on top of a steel tower high above the ground, and it bathed the huddle of buildings around it in deep, ghastly bluish light that foreshortened everything around it.

Goochy pulled the car up next to the front porch of the biggest building near it. Daniels got out, groaning a little as the blood circulated in his stiffened legs. He and Goochy climbed the worn wooden steps of the building.

Goochy was slapping at his trousers. "Dust," he said disgustedly. "Dust. Don't they grow nothin' in this country but dust?"

They went into a low-ceilinged bare room thick with the smell of tobacco and old food. A counter ran the length of the room on one side, and Daniels and Goochy sat down on stools in front of it.

Goochy drummed his fingers on the worn wood. "Come on, come on! Let's have some service!"

A fat, bald-headed man with a placidly sleepy face came through a door at the rear and went around behind the counter.

"Howdy, gents. What's your pleasure?"

"Pleasure?" Goochy repeated. "Pleasure, he says. The guy's a foreigner or something. What's pleasure got to do with it? We want to eat, dope. Food, food. Give me a beer and a dog sandwich."

"No beer," said Daniels. "Coffee."

"No beer!" Goochy echoed, insulted. "I should drink slop? Am I a kid or something?"

"Two hamburgers," said Daniels. "And two cups of coffee."

Two highway patrolmen came in through the same door the fat man had used. They stared at Goochy with a sort of amused, disbelieving interest.

"It's a fact, all right," one said.

The other nodded. "Yeah. I wouldn't believe it. Talk some more, kid."

Goochy glared. "Huh? Talk? Who to? You think I got nothing better to do than chatter with apes like you?"

Both officers chuckled.

"What's the trouble?" Daniels asked alertly.

The first officer nodded at him in a friendly way. "Mel and Denny—the two boys who stopped you down the road—radioed that they had flagged a million-dollar car that had one of the Dead End Kids for a chauffeur. We thought they were crazy or joking. But it's true—about the chauffeur, anyway. He talks just like those kids in the movies."

"Wait a minute now, chum," said Goochy. "Just hold still while I brush off that remark and get a good look at it."

"The Dead End Kids," the second officer explained, grinning. "You know—the ones that play the tough slum kids in the movies."

"What?" Goochy shrieked. "Them punks! You comparin' me with them sissies? Gimme a bottle! Gimme a beer bottle, and I'll bat out your brains—"

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"Quit it!" Daniels ordered.

Goochy was stuttering with rage. "I'm insulted! You hear what these punks said? Me! Me! A Dead End lacy pants! Gimme that bottle, fatty! I'll cave in—"

"Sit down and be quiet!" Daniels snapped.

Goochy subsided, mumbling malignantly.

"What an act," said the first officer admiringly. "The kid's really good. Well, we've got to drift along. See you later, Zeke."

"Yeah," said the fat man. "Careful, boys. Them Dragans is bad medicine."

"They'll be dead medicine if we spot 'em. Care if we take a look at your car, mister? We've never seen one like it out here."

"Go ahead," Daniels invited.

GOOCHY was still talking to himself in an undertone. Meat spattered and sizzled on the grill at the end of the counter. Outside the officers' car drove away in a rattling spatter of gravel, and the sound of its engine faded to a hum down the road, finally died away.

The fat man brought the sandwiches and coffee. Goochy ate in grumpy silence. Fatigue was like a heavy hand laid across the back of Daniels' neck, but the hot food and drink lifted a little of the weight of it.

"Any more news on the bank robbery?" he asked the fat proprietor.

"Nope. They're still sneakin' around somewhere. The boys'll nail 'em by tomorrow."

"One of the gang was killed?"

"Yup." The fat man chewed drowsily on a toothpick. "Old Doc Deacon—he's a dentist—got him. Doc has an office in Trail's End upstairs across from the bank. He was drillin' a guy's tooth when he happened to look out and see 'em through the bank's window.

"Doc's got his hunting rifle in the office, so he up and lays down on this one bird right through the bank's plate-glass window. Took him in the side of the head and wiped his face off. Good shot, Doc is. The other two boiled out the back of the bank, where they had their car, and Doc couldn't lay a bead on 'em."

"This is pretty lonely country. Aren't you afraid they might drop in here?"

Without moving a step the fat man reached under the counter and produced a sawed-off shotgun. "No," he said slowly. "Not exactly afraid. Been kinda hopin' they would, though. Nice reward for them boys."

Goochy choked on a mouthful of food. With wide eyes he looked from the shotgun to the fat man and finally to Daniels. When the fat man tucked the shotgun away out of sight under the counter and moved lazily away, Goochy nudged Daniels with a sharp elbow.

"Hey, ain't nobody afraid of *nobody* around here? I hear tell of these Dragans. They got a reputation as big as Dickey Hale has. They're hard guys."

"Maybe people out here don't know that."

They finished their meal, and Daniels paid the fat man. Outside the air felt cool and fresh in their faces. They were in a pocket-like valley here, and all around them in one giant circle the barren hills camped like sullen, dark guardians.

"What a country!" Goochy said, shivering.

"Want me to drive?" Daniels asked.

"Naw, naw. I'm just warmin' up, chum. I'll drag it for another couple hundred miles."

The car rolled across the bumpy gravel of the parking space and out on the concrete highway and began to pick up speed.

Goochy had his head tilted to one side. "Hey! She's ridin' different. I think we got a soft tire. . . ."

There was a quiet snap behind Daniels' head and then another and another. He jerked his head around and looked squarely into the round muzzle of a revolver. It was not more than six inches from his face. Daniels caught his breath with a sudden involuntary gasp.

ONE edge of the tarpaulin that covered the rear seat space had been unsnapped and lifted a little, and the revolver was poked through the opening.

A soft drawling voice behind the gun said: "Your tires are all right, kid. You just picked up a couple of passengers."

Goochy jumped. His hands jerked on the big steering wheel, and the car heeled over, tires squealing.

The drawling voice lost its softness. "Drive straight, damn you! Keep on the right!"

Goochy straightened the car out. "Yuh-yes, sir."

"Pick it up. Go faster."

"How—how fast?" Goochy asked.

"As fast as this damned car will go."

The sound of the motor deepened, and the wind began to hammer resistingly at the top.

"Hell's fire!" said the soft voice. "What you got here, an airplane? What's she doin' now?"

"Ninety-five," said Goochy.

"Slow down to eighty and hold it."

Daniels had recovered his voice, and he said now in a level tone: "You're the men who held up the bank at Trail's End?"

"How'd you ever guess it? Now listen—both of you. You're gonna take us through the barricade ahead and get us out of this damned rat trap."

"Listen, mister," said Goochy. "Them—them guys on them barricades got choppers. They'll cut us into mince meat if we—"

"Shut that big mouth and listen. We was outside all the time you was in that eating joint. We was thinkin' maybe we might nail them cops' car. But this is better. We heard what the cops said about you and this buggy. They're expectin' to see you. They won't look you over very careful. We ain't gonna smash through their barricade. We're gonna stop, and you're gonna talk us through."

"Tuh-talk?" Goochy said.

"Not you, stupid. This pal of yours. He's a smoothie. You listenin', guy?"

"Yes," said Daniels.

"You talk us through. They got you and your car spotted and identified, and they won't bother to search you again. If they do—I don't have to draw out what's gonna happen to you two, do I?"

## CHAPTER V

### MY CHUM'S GOT A GUN

THEY came on the barricade suddenly, dead ahead, as they rounded a curve. Two cars this time, parked so that their headlights crossed, with red spot-lights flicking back and forth above them.

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The man in the back seat hadn't spoken for the last ten miles, but his voice came now as soft and drawling as it had been in the first place, not hurried, not excited.

"There they are. You in front of me, fasten the tarp down except for the one snap in back of your neck."

Daniels reached back clumsily, following his orders. Goochy was braking the car slowly and gingerly.

The soft voice was slightly muffled. "You can't see me, mister, but I got a bead right on the back of your head. I can see you, and I can hear you. And you driving, my pal has got you covered right through the back of the front seat. Talk, mister, and it had better be good."

The headlights of the cars forming the barricade were a blurred glare, and Goochy pulled up in front of them and switched off his own lights. He sat there rigid as a statue, trying to see back over his shoulder without turning his head.

"Take it easy," Daniels whispered.

"Oh," said Goochy in a sick voice. "Oh, oh."

An officer loomed up beside the phaeton. "Hi, fellas." It was the tall man they had seen in the restaurant. He leaned down and grinned through the window at them. "Didn't pick up any hitch-hikers, did you?"

Daniels smiled back at him, feeling the muscles stretch taut and wooden in his face. "No. Not a one."

"See any other cars, at all?"

"No," said Daniels. His voice sounded hollow and small in his own ears, and he could hear a slight rustle under the tarpaulin, like a slow coiling snake. "There don't seem to be many people driving along here."

"This is a pretty lonely stretch. No towns that you could really call towns for fifty miles one way and seventy-five miles the other. You're out West now."

"Yes," said Daniels.

"How are you, tough guy?" the officer asked Goochy. "You don't seem to be talking so much."

Goochy pulled himself together. "What do you think I am—a parrot or something? I told you I got better things to do than talk to dopes like you. I got brains, see? Brains. Us guys that's got brains has got to do a lot of thinkin'. You wouldn't know nothin' about that, so I'm tellin' you."

The officer laughed. "Boy, you've certainly got a lingo all your own. Well, go ahead, fellows, and drive carefully." He stepped back. "Okay, Bill! It's the guys we saw eating back at the Junction. See you some time, boys."

Goochy pulled the phaeton between the slanted headlights of the barricade cars. As soon as he was through, he tramped hard on the accelerator, sliding through the gears with a series of rattling bursts from the exhaust.

Instantly the front of the tarpaulin jerked up with sudden quick pops from the fasteners.

"Slower, stupid!" the soft voice snarled. "Wait until you get out of sight."

Goochy eased off on the accelerator.

"That's better. You did that very nice, mister. Lucky for you both. All right, they can't see us any more from the barricade. Give this bus all she's got. Straight ahead for the next thirty miles—and fast!"

THE phaeton spurted ahead as though some giant hand had shoved it. The night around them blurred into liquid soft blackness, and the road reeled under them like a streak of flatly soiled tape. Wind roar filled the interior of the car until it was a physical force pressed hard against their eardrums. The car swayed and gave on its long springs as it took the curves, spurning them.

Goochy's face was white and taut in the dim glow of the dash-lights, and his hands gripped the steering wheel so hard the cords on their backs stood out rigidly.

The car was made for speed, built and designed for that, and now it was fulfilling its purpose. It howled through the night like a meteor—on and on and on. And then the revolver barrel came up and tapped Daniels on the shoulder.

He turned around. The man in the back seat was leaning close to him, and Daniels could see his face for the first time—dim and shadowy like a smeared drawing. Black eyebrows made a straight, thick bar above a hawk-like nose, and the mouth was a thin slit, down-turned at its corners. His voice came dimly through the wind roar.

"Slow!"

Daniels nudged Goochy, and the car began to slacken speed as the engine drag pulled it down.

"Slower," the man said. "Slow clear down."

Goochy began to dab at the brakes expertly. The night assumed its normal aspect again and ceased to be the thick black liquid through which the car had been falling like a plummet.

"Okay. You see that bridge ahead. We turn off about a hundred yards past it."

The concrete sides of the bridge flashed white on either side of them.

"Right here. Take it real slow. There's a bad bump when you cross the ditch."

The car dipped down, groaned. The wheels banged hard against the dry bottom of the ditch, spun in loose dust, caught suddenly and heaved them up the other side.

"Douse the lights."

Daniels flicked the switch.

"Hey!" Goochy exclaimed. "I can't see. . . ."

"There's a road here, and you'd better find it! To the left, stupid!"

The car heeled over and brush scraped along its sides. Twigs snapped the windshield and Goochy ducked involuntarily. The road was a winding, crooked path that went slanting across a flat, around the shoulder of a bare high bluff.

"Left again, stupid! Can't you drive?"

Daniels said: "He's not used to driving in this kind of country."

"He'll damned well get used to it. Keep going."

THE road followed up through the narrow confines of a high-walled canyon, and Goochy spun the wheel again and again, frantically trying to avoid the big boulders that were strewn along it.

"Stop here."

Goochy slammed on the brakes and stopped the car. He gave a long-drawn wheezing sigh of relief.

"Listen, you two. Sit tight right here. I'm gonna get out. My pal will be covering you. Hear me?"

"Yes," said Daniels.

More of the tarpaulin's fasteners snapped, and the man with the soft voice heaved himself out over the side of the car. He stood there a moment—a tall, high shadow in the darkness, gaunt and dangerously still. He was listening tensely, turning his head slowly as he searched the shadows around him. The revolver in his right hand gleamed black.

He said: "Watch 'em," in an undertone to the in-

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visible man back of Daniels and Goochy, and walked in front of the car with long smooth steps. He stopped again about twenty yards away.

"Tully," he said. His voice was low, but it carried clearly in the stillness.

"Rex?"

"Yeah," said the man with the soft voice.

Brush crackled on the side hill, and a man seemed to rise out of the ground there. He had a riot-gun in his hands, and he was holding its thick stubby length at the ready, hip-high.

"All clear, Rex?"

"Yeah."

The second man joined the first one. Seen together, they had the same gaunt, shambling height. There was something alike even in the way they walked and stood.

Goochy whispered in an awed voice: "Rex and Tully Dragan! They're the—"

The second man who had ridden with them spoke for the first time. "Shut up! Get out of the car—both of you. Get out on the driver's side."

Goochy opened the door and stepped to the ground, standing there awkwardly with his hands half-raised. Daniels slid under the wheel and stood beside him.

The Dragans had come back to the car, and they stood side by side, watching Goochy and Daniels.

"What you got here?" Tully asked.

"We had to pick 'em off and use 'em to get through. They had every road blocked off on us."

Tully said: "Yeah. You sure stirred yourself up a fire. I didn't think you'd make it." His voice was flat and indifferent. "Who'd they biff in the bank?"

"Braely. The damned fool got in front of the window and somebody nailed him from across the street. Busted his head like a pumpkin."

"He was always a lame-brain," Tully said. "I told you to leave him here planted with the car and take me."

"Yeah," said Rex. "And you know what woulda happened. He'd have got cold feet sittin' here alone."

"Maybe. What'd you take?"

"Something over nineteen thousand. Ain't counted close yet."

The third man had climbed out of the car and was standing behind Daniels and Goochy.

"The way these boobs was beatin' the bush you'd think we took a million," he said.

"Dickey Hale!" Goochy gasped, twisting his head around with a startled jerk.

HE WAS the same as Daniels had remembered. He hadn't changed much in those years. The same white, set face and the broken teeth showing now as he twisted his lips into a carelessly savage grimace.

"So what, punk?"

Goochy gulped. "Well—well, don't you remember me, Dickey? You know, I was talkin' to you just a few months ago when you was hidin' out in the big town from the Feds. You know, Dickey. At Dugan's Pool Hall."

"Aw, sure," said Dickey Hale. "You was the punk that wanted to drive for me, huh? Sure, sure." He seemed to tighten up suddenly, cold and tense and dangerous. "And what the hell you doin' out here?"

"J-just drivin' for this guy, here. He's a lawyer, and he—he wanted—me . . ."

Dickey Hale relaxed again. "Yeah. Mouthpiece, huh? I seen you before too, mister. Where?"

Daniels said: "At Public School Number Eight. Jim Daniels is the name."

"Daniels!" said Dickey Hale. "Well, hell! The mug that was always studin' books. Yeah, yeah."

Rex Dragan said: "What gives here, Dick?"

There was something in his soft voice that jerked Dickey Hale around and froze him motionless, crouched a little.

"What you mean—what gives?"

"You holdin' a convention of your pals?"

"We wouldn't like that, Dick," Tully said.

The night silence was suddenly alive with little charged prickles of danger.

"So you wouldn't like it?" said Dickey Hale, and his thin shoulders moved with a slow crawling motion.

"Come off it, Dick," said Rex. "We're askin', that's all."

Dickey Hale laughed in a thin, high titter. "Don't ask too tough, chums. The punk here is just a kid that lives down near where I used to. The other guy I went to school with. I ain't seen him for ten years. I didn't have nothin' to do with 'em gettin' here. You was the one who got the idea of pickin' up them and their car, Rex."

Rex nodded. "Yeah. Okay. Come on. We're movin' out."

"Car's parked under some brush down by the road," Tully said.

"This one's faster," said Rex.

Tully snorted. "You damned fool! Every cop in the state's got it spotted. They been radioin' back and forth about it. I was listenin' in."

"I suppose so," Rex agreed reluctantly. "It sure can step, though."

"Let's move," said Tully.

"And what about these two babies?" Dickey Hale asked in a sly whisper. "Hey, boys? What about them?"

"They ain't goin' no place," said Tully.

Goochy made a noise swallowing. "Dickey, you—you wouldn't . . ."

Dickey Hale giggled. His skinny shoulders jerked again, and then he was holding a .45 Colt automatic in each hand—big guns that dragged down at his thin wrists. The dim light made flicking streaks along the blunt thick barrels.

"Say when, chumps," Dickey Hale said, and giggled again.

Goochy's voice went up high with hysteria. "Dickey—"

"Steady," Daniels said. "Steady, Goochy. He's not going to shoot."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

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# Bitter Voyage

## By David Vern

*Author of "The Golden Boneyard," "Secret of the Silent Drum," etc.*

**The sun boiled them and the sea was a shriveling glare, as they waited furtively for their new passenger: Horror was coming aboard. And then a fever ran through the ship, more personal and sinister than any plague, while a man's bones slowly turned to dust. A gripping story of a ship with two masters**

THEY said the war had tangled up our Atlantic shipping, and they wanted me to come back from Shanghai to see what I could do about it, so I came. I spent four hours of a beautiful morning sitting around impressive mahogany conference tables, but in the afternoon I managed to get Buchanan alone.

J. J. Buchanan was the kind of a man you wanted in a situation like this. He saved the charts and the diagrams until he'd spoken to you for half an hour. After that you didn't need them. In the five years I'd spent with Iverness Maritime, I'd come to appreciate Buchanan just from reading his memos and speaking to him over the phone, Shanghai to New York, ten dollars a minute. Buchanan didn't waste money, so this was the first time I'd ever really spoken a whole sentence to him.

We put in an hour smoking and talking. Things like, "You agree we ought to put so-and-so back in such-and-such a department?" and we always agreed. Until he mentioned Dr. Avin Simpson.

That's how I happened to hear the strange story of Simpson's first voyage, which I mean to pass on to you in about a minute. Because when I said I couldn't see my way clear to putting such a young man in a job that had beaten two good men already, Buchanan invited me downstairs to meet him. We went down; but when we got to the balcony that led to a large office directly under it something was going on, so we stopped.

A seaman, a big fellow the size of Buchanan, was standing with his legs apart and shouting at two men behind a desk. One of them was a clerk, but the other had a little gold Caduceus embroidered on his uniform sleeve. I wondered if this was Dr. Simpson, but he looked too old for the man I'd heard about.

The doctor seemed agitated, and we could barely hear him. "Look here, Mr. Franks," he said, conscious that the whole office was looking on, "there's nothing I can do. The checker at the hiring hall said you were on their sick list, and you're on ours. You were supposed to have kept that cast on for three weeks." He tapped a nervous finger on a pink sheet on the desk. "Let me have a look at that arm," he said.

"Like hell," said the sailor, stepping closer. "Since when do I let a two-bit medic swindle me out of a chance at a premium berth?" He pointed a savage finger at the pink sheet. "Whose arm is it?" he shouted. "You keep me on that sick list and I'll ram it down your throat!"

It was an ugly moment. I'd seen moments like it explode; they called for the smoothest kind of handling. The doctor licked his lips and took a step back. A girl at a nearby desk got up. Then, at the far end of the room, a door opened and a young, slender fellow in white trousers and an open shirt stood in the doorway. I met Buchanan's glance. "That would be the redoubtable Simpson?" I asked. He nodded.

This Simpson walked down the room on rubber-soled shoes, coming quickly. He stopped at the desk and picked up the pink sheet. "Hold out your right arm, Abe," he said.

The sailor hesitated, then raised his arm. Simpson took the sailor's hand and stretched the arm out full length. Then he raised his own right hand, holding the palm sideways. Suddenly he hammered his hand down. The blow landed just below the sailor's elbow. A stifled, staccato cry of pain burst from the sailor, and he went halfway to his knees before Simpson caught him.

"That's a bad arm, Abe," Simpson said. "We'll have to put a new cast on." He made a notation on the pink sheet. "Come on, Abe," he said. "I've got some good applejack if you want it."

Just like that, you understand. The seaman caught his breath about the same time I did. He wiped the sweat off his face, picked up his jacket and followed Simpson across the room. Halfway back, Simpson saw us in the balcony and he walked over right below us. "Hi!" he said cheerily to Buchanan. "I'm coming up for dinner tonight. Tell Helen." He waved and went back to his office.

That wave of his made it clear to me. I'd been thinking he looked like the college kids you see around tennis courts. Young, clean, open-faced, about five feet nine, hair the color of dark sand, rather pleasant. . . . But certainly not the same—

Buchanan coughed into his hand. "Helen's my daughter," he said with a slight smile. "Simpson's engaged to her."

"Interesting," I said, wryly, "but it doesn't explain it." I took another deep breath. "Buchanan," I said, "I'll be damned! Is that the one they call—is that snip of a boy—"

"He's twenty-seven," Buchanan said. "I know how you feel. One just doesn't swallow a local legend like Simpson the first time."

"Not so local. The redoubtable Simpson, they call him, don't they?" Buchanan nodded again. "Uh huh," I said. "I've heard stories about him. Some good ones too. But this job—"

We went back to the office. Buchanan wrinkled his forehead and lit a pipe. "Settle back," he said. "I'm going to tell you the story of Dr. Avin Simpson's first voyage. It happened almost five years ago, and it's the



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story of a struggle between him and a fellow we'll call Captain Casey."

He smiled for a long, exasperating minute while he drew on his pipe. "That was the beginning of the legend. Maybe you'll understand."

## CHAPTER I

### THE CAPTAIN STRIKES FIRST

DR. AVIN SIMPSON stood at the pier, watching the big freighter *Typee* taking on the last of her cargo. The afternoon was well advanced, and it was time he came aboard, but he wanted to stand there and watch and listen, because he was part of this scene now. And waiting would help calm him, he thought. He needed calming. He smiled to himself as he thought, *Pulse, 120; respiration, fast and shallow.*

The gray and white *Typee* rode low, the red stripe of her Plimsoll line inches over the water, and the ship strained her ropes in sympathy with the pull of the outgoing tide. Three lighters lay alongside, their cranes swinging up heavy crates marked with the trade names of automobiles and phonographs, and the careless letters of their destination: Puerto Cortez, Honduras.

The dock was noisy with the shouts of men, the singing of pulleys. Nearby, a donkey engine thundered as it struggled with boxcars from a railroad barge in the next dock; a coastal passenger ship, steaming into the East River, let go with a nerve-shattering whistle; boxwood and a log-raft hammered slowly and insistently against the piling near him.

He was part of this now, Simpson thought, and there was an omen. The late sun stretched the shadow of a nearby bridge until the steel spiderweb of the bridge's cables fell over the dock, the piers, the warehouses, the ship and him, binding them together in a shadowy net of squares. Across the river, the high towers of lower Manhattan were becoming silhouettes against a green and crimson sky.

Young Dr. Simpson looked down at the oil-stained water and remembered what he had been told about Captain Casey, and what his first voyage might mean. Then he went aboard.

**Complete Short Novel**

The men held Casey while he smashed at them in convulsive fury

. . . "All right, Dr. Simpson." Captain Casey had been watching the loading, leaning over the starboard side when the second mate brought Simpson to him. He didn't turn around, and for a moment that was all he said.

But when the mate started to leave, he moved his hand slightly and said, "One minute, Mr. Foster. I'll want you to show the doctor to his quarters." Then he was silent again, until the silence became hostile, until Simpson became aware of his own breathing again.

By then he knew there was going to be no chance with Captain Casey. He could see it in the stiff line of the captain's smooth-shaven jaw.

"The *Typee* is the finest ship of the Iverness line." Slowly, the captain turned as he spoke, until he faced the doctor. "They told you that uptown, didn't they? They told you a lot of things, didn't they? You know



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you're not welcome aboard this ship." He spoke quietly, in measured words. He was tall, heavily built, with a sun-baked, almost florid handsomeness that was the combination of good health and cleanliness. His blond-gray hair was neatly combed, his eyes were light.

"I'm the master here. Remember that." The captain turned his back again. "Now that we understand each other, Mr. Foster will show you to your quarters."

DR. SIMPSON nodded and said nothing. He followed the second mate forward to the deckhouse. The last cabin off the passageway was small and scrupulously clean. It held two cots, a chest of drawers, a kneehole desk and a chair. The mate closed the door, sat down on one bed and held out a pack of cigarettes.

"I'll bunk here with you if you stay," Foster said. "It ain't too late to change your mind."

Simpson took the light and inhaled deeply. "You know," he said, "I started smoking the first day I had to cut open a cadaver in med. school. Wonderful habit—lets all the tension out." He took another drag. "They told me about him," he said. "It isn't as if I didn't know."

"Yep," said Foster, looking intently at his cigarette. "I been with the old man two years now. They told me too, but it's different when you find out for yourself." He was thin and red-faced, and his hair was falling out though he was a young man. He meditated on his words. "You know what's back of it, don't you?" he asked.

"Mmmmm," Simpson nodded. "Avoid things like that business last month on the *Robin White,* where half the crew came down with typhoid. This is a fine experiment, putting doctors on the large freighters, even when there aren't any passengers."

"To hell with typhoid," Foster said. He stretched his arms over his head. "That's what the old man says. The *Robin White* was near two weeks late getting into port. That couldn't happen to the old man. One thing about this ship: she's on schedule, like a damned express train, and she'd stay that way if the crew had to stand watch on crutches to do it."

An ash dropped on the bed and Foster blew it off. "Now you get a sawbones on a ship— Hell, this morning the old man gave the crew one of his talks. Warned them about getting ideas they could take vacations aboard ship by applying to the sick bay." He laughed. "Vacations—ha!"

Simpson stamped out his cigarette. "Where's the infirmary?" he said. "You mind showing me?"

"After house, on the poop deck. We call it a sick bay aboard ship," Foster said. He led the way back to the deck. "How long you been a doc?" he asked.

"I don't look that young, do I?"

"Yep." The mate grinned. "You look it, and more. You might be the youngest man aboard if you let your age get out."

The booms near the after holds were no longer being used as the two men walked to the poop deck. A tug had come into the dock and the last lighter was almost empty. Captain Casey stood where they had left him, leaning over the side.

The cabin into which Foster led the way was large and bare. A square table stood against a bulkhead near a narrow cabinet and a chair lay on its side in the middle of the cabin. Tacked on one bulkhead was a first aid chart, an advertisement from a famous drug company.

The cabinet had one shelf. On it were some boxes of absorbent cotton and gauze bandages, a dirty roll of adhesive tape, a half bottle of peroxide, two bottles of iodine and a broken pair of scissors. On the floor of the cabinet lay some pink sheets labeled, *Medical Reports,* with the Iverness Maritime seal on them, and a dusty book: *The Family Doctor—One Thousand Common Ailments and Their Cure.*

"Mr. Foster," Simpson said, shaking his head, "the ship can't sail with the infirmary in this condition."

"The *Typee* sails in about fifteen minutes, doc," said Foster, his voice very low.

Outside, suddenly, the tug let go two sharp blasts.

The doctor looked past Foster, staring at the first aid chart. "You've got to help me, Mr. Foster. The captain won't—"

The mate was shaking his head. "You better not need help, doc, because you won't get it from anyone." He looked down at the deck, and his thin face was troubled. "Hell," he said, "I'm just the second. I get kicked around too. I've been carrying a master's papers for three years. If the old man boots me out, I'm out." He stepped over the sill. "You got to know it, doc," he said. "You're on your own here."

"I see," said Simpson. He ran a hand through his sandy hair. "I can't do anything with this," he said, half to the mate. "It isn't fair to expect any experiment to work this way." He pushed past Foster and went out on deck, then down the accommodation ladder.

IT WAS dark when Dr. Simpson returned, four hours later. The *Typee's* running lights were on, and the tug stood by, the orange glow of her boiler painting the dark water. The second mate was near the top of the ladder as Simpson came on deck.

"Where've you been?" he asked anxiously. "How'd you know we'd still be here?" He looked directly at Simpson. "The old man's going crazy in his cabin. He's been drinking for the last two hours. They won't let us sail until we get word from the front office."

"I know. I phoned them. They said they'd call the captain and hold the ship until I got what I needed." A truck came rumbling along the street that bordered the docks. It stopped at the *Typee's* pier and men sprang out. "Here it is," Simpson said. They were taking out three large crates from the truck.

"Listen, doc!" Foster took the doctor's arm. "Don't tell the old man you know anything about this. You don't know, understand?"

"Thanks, Mr. Foster," Simpson said. "But if he asks me, I'll tell him. I'm not afraid of him. This just had to be done."

The sides of the warehouse doors creaked loudly as they opened, and a man shouted up for a boom to hoist the crates. The second mate ran down the deck. He passed the deckhouse just as Captain Casey came out.

The captain was without his coat, and his sleeves were unbuttoned. Steadily he walked toward the doctor. "What's going on here?" he asked of the crew on deck. No one answered. The booms of the aft mast were being lowered. "What's coming aboard?" Casey said, his voice louder as he stared.

"It's medical supplies, sir," Simpson said, advancing toward the captain. "Mr. James of the main office said

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I might get them when I called him. He said he'd hold the ship for me."

Captain Casey was standing quite close to Simpson. He backed away a step. His light eyes were almost invisible in the gloom, his large frame immobile, towering over the doctor. "Would you mind explaining, Dr. Simpson?" he said. "Do I understand you to be saying that you held my ship here to wait for your supplies?"

"Yes sir. I don't think it necessary to wait for the call any longer. Mr. James is only waiting for me to phone him."

The captain was standing about two feet away from Simpson. He took a short step forward and brought his right arm up in a swift arc. His fist smashed squarely into Simpson's face. The doctor fell against the rail, and he didn't move.

Later, when Simpson stirred and saw the second mate undressing him in his bed, he heard Foster mutter, "You wouldn't listen to me. A fine voyage this is going to be for you. A fine . . ."

The rest of it was lost when the tug hooted dully. The *Typee* was under way and the cabin bulkheads were dim and unsteady.

## CHAPTER II

### CARGO OF CHAOS

TOWARD the middle of the afternoon on the second day out, the *Typee* began to labor in a heavy sea. The clouds had piled up in layers. The sun continued to shine intermittently until the whipping breeze brought dark thunderheads from the horizon. After that there was a long twilight, and the sea smashed against the *Typee's* sides.

Dr. Simpson had been standing in the bow when he felt the first spasm of nausea seize him. He went below and lay down in his cabin, but it didn't help, and after a while he was sick. He caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror; his face was the gray-green of moldy bread, all but the dark stain on his cheekbone. He tried to sleep.

The singing was coming from amidship. Simpson's watch told him that he had been asleep forty minutes, but the singing had wakened him. An accordion suddenly joined in, and the melody became more evident. It was the old *Madamoiselle From Armentiers*. The words came faintly against the wind, but listening carefully, Simpson heard them.

*Oh, the doc he's got a belly-ache, parlee voo*
*The Doc he's got a belly-ache, parlee voo*
*The Doc he's got a belly-ache*
*Stop the ship, for Heaven's sake,*
*Hinky dinky parlee voo.*

Sometimes the verses were funny, and the singing grew louder. Simpson began to feel his head throbbing in rhythm with the music, and his pulse was racing. He wondered whether he would have gotten out of bed and ordered them to stop if he had been able.

The air had become thick and odorous. He tried to open the porthole, but it was jammed. When he opened the door, he saw a basin filled with stew in the passageway. The stew kept spilling over the basin's edges as the ship rocked; it was still warm, and the smell of it was choking. The instant Simpson had opened the door, the singing on deck had stopped. They had been waiting for him to discover it.

The doctor closed the door, and laughter floated down the ship. He tore small strips from a handkerchief and stuffed his nostrils. He had been lying in the gloom for an hour when Foster came in. The mate sat down on his bed. "I got rid of that damn stew," he said. "There's a blow coming up. Ought to hit us soon." He started to take out a cigarette, then put it back. "You look like hell," he said.

"I feel a lot better now."

"Well, you don't look it." Foster lapsed into silence. "I'll be wanted on deck," he said presently, rising. "First dog is my watch." Before he opened the door, he added, "I'd have gotten them away if I didn't know the old man had put them up to it."

When the doctor woke again, the ship had stopped pitching. He sat up, remembering vaguely that Foster had come in again and left quietly after taking his oilskins. There had been rain after that. He had heard it falling on deck, distant and soothing. Now it had stopped.

The deck was still wet, and an occasional drop fell, but the easterly wind had cleared the lower horizon and stars showed. He stood against the rail and heard four bells ring, their sound clear and lonely. Steps sounded on deck, and someone came hurrying along on the port side and disappeared into the deck house. When he came out, he saw Simpson. It was Foster.

"Looking for you, doc," he said. "Glad to see you're all right. Don't like to bother you, but I'd like to borrow the keys to those new cabinets you got in the sick bay. You mind?"

"Why do you want the keys?"

"Nothing important. Somebody slipped on deck. He said not to bother you. All he wants is for me to give him some cotton to stuff in his mouth.."

"In his mouth?" Foster was silent. "I'll have a look at him. Where is he?"

"In the sick bay. Look, doc, you don't have to go. It's nothing at all. Only reason I'm asking you is because this is Hales' watch and he doesn't know you."

THERE were three men in the sick bay. They had turned on the large standing lights that Simpson had screwed into the floor. One of them sat on a white enameled stool, holding a blood-stained handkerchief in his mouth. The other two stood beside him. When Simpson entered the room, they all looked at the second mate. They had drawn up in a close circle in the middle of the white furniture, uneasily, it was clear. There was blood on the floor.

Simpson walked to the man who was sitting and took his hand away, and pulled away the bloody handkerchief. "How did this happen?" Simpson asked.

Foster filled in the momentary silence by answering quickly, "He hit his face against the ventilator in the fo'c'sle."

The doctor took out his keys and opened a steel cabinet. He turned on another light and began taking out several instruments.

"Doc," one of the men said, hesitantly, "all Joe wants is some cotton. He's all right."

"Are you all right, Joe?" Simpson asked. Joe was nodding his head when Simpson looked up. "Fine," said

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Simpson. "Now we'll stop the pain before it drives you crazy." He wiped away the tears that were running down the man's cheeks, then squirted a hypodermic syringe on the floor while he kept speaking. "As soon as this takes, the pain will stop." He opened the seaman's mouth and slid the needle into the blood-smeared gums; they were bleeding so profusely it was impossible to keep them clean.

"Doc," said the same man who had spoken before, "If you don't—"

"I work better without interruptions," Simpson said evenly. "Now, Joe, you've broken your upper incisors clean off, flush with the gum. I think the bone's all right, so the best thing to do is let them stay that way until you can get a dentist to make you a couple of pivot teeth. You beginning to feel a numbness in your mouth? Good. Now, this upper left canine is almost out. I can pull it easily enough and it won't hurt. But I'll have to sew up the lacerations here—"

"Alex!" a voice called from the deck. "You there?" Hale, the third mate, climbed up the poop and came in. He blinked in the light. "Captain Casey wants the watch down in number four hold." His eyes had become accustomed to the light, and he hesitated when he looked at Joe. The blood was still running and the sight wasn't pleasant. "Cargo's shifted," he said to Foster.

"All right, Mr. Hale," Foster said. "Alex and Buck, you report to the captain. I'll stand Joe's trick. Be along in a minute."

Later, when Simpson remembered the events of that night, he saw Foster's face the way it had looked when he said, "Doc, get through with him as fast as you can." The light had defined his features sharply, almost harshly, and there was more urgency in the thinness of his lips than in the words he said, though he whispered them. It was a look of expectancy, suspended and almost fearful.

The doctor saw the same look in Joe's eyes when he went back to him: an attitude that combined waiting and listening.

WHEN Captain Casey climbed the ladder to the sick bay, Simpson knew who it was before he had entered. Although, strictly speaking, the captain didn't enter at first. He kept one hand on the doorknob and looked in. "Mr. Panelli," he said, "didn't you hear the order to the watch? Why aren't you down in the hold?"

"He can't answer you, sir. I've got a forceps in his mouth." Simpson turned back to Joe. "He heard your order, but he's in no condition to work."

"The order was mine, doctor. Did you countermand it?"

"No sir. No one had to. This man is on the sick list."

"By whose order?"

"My judgment, sir." Simpson could feel Joe Panelli's breath coming quickly over his hands as he fastened the forceps more securely. "I'm ship's doctor. I'll file a detailed report."

Casey walked into the room then. "Take that damned thing out of his mouth. I want him in the hold. We've had meen lose teeth before. It isn't important."

"It's important to him, sir. He'll be able to work tomorrow, but if I don't help him, he won't be able to eat."

Casey said, "Did you hear me?"

The doctor took out the forceps. His hands fell to his sides. "I'm afraid I can't obey that order, captain. You stay put, Joe." He pushed Panelli back to the stool, and turned again to Casey. "You can put me in irons after I'm through, but not until then."

Rapidly, the captain strode across the deck to the steel cabinet. He swept his arms across the glass shelves and threw the instruments to the deck. Two heavy bottle crashed into the bulkheads, staining them and filling the room with the sharp odor of alcohol. He couldn't open either of the other cabinets, so he swung back a chair and smashed it against them until their sides buckled. He wheeled around with the chair, kicking the glistening instruments under his feet, and threw the chair at one of the stand lights. The bulb exploded and glass flew in a thin shower. When he raised the chair again, he saw Simpson and stopped.

The doctor was holding Panelli with one hand. In the other he held a long, thin scalpel. He stood completely immobile; even his breathing seemed to have stopped, only his fingers moved on the scalpel, and his eyes were fixed stonily on Casey. He might have been rooted with fear, like Panelli. He might have been poised.

Casey met his eyes, and suddenly he began to laugh quietly. He put the chair down and brushed a splinter of glass from his coat. The laughter ended as abruptly as it had begun. "Doctor," he said, and his voice was almost pleasant, "before this voyage is over—" He didn't finish. He let the words hang in midair and walked quickly out of the room.

When the doctor cleaned up the room, Joe Panelli didn't raise a finger to help him. Simpson cleaned the instruments, swept the deck, put new bulbs in the battered stands. Panelli didn't utter a sound even after the doctor was through with him. They had sat close together for more than an hour then, and they were both exhausted.

Just before Simpson turned off the lights, he saw Panelli looking at him; and whether it was fatigue or the slow relaxing from pain, or something else—because Simpson had seen people cry in hospitals and knew that often there was no reason for it—whatever it was, he thought Panelli was on the verge of crying. But of course, the moment he saw it, Simpson turned aside and went out.

## CHAPTER III

### RESPIRATION FAST

THE remarkable thing was that only Avin Simpson foresaw what would follow the episode in the sick bay, which was—nothing at all. Simpson told Foster nothing would happen and nothing did. He based his foresight on an understanding of Captain Casey. Whether his supposition would have proved true had the voyage remained a normal one—

But it didn't. Off Puerto Cortez, the whole business blew up without a fair trial.

"You see," the doctor had said to Foster one day, "when the captain hit me the night we left port, it wasn't because he thought I'd questioned his authority. If he'd thought that, he'd have acted according to law and clapped me in irons. No, he socked me because he felt I had *ignored* his authority. And he went right to the heart of it when he began to smash the infirm— the sick bay."

Foster looked blank. "I've lost it again," he said.

"It's simple enough. I'm aboard to do a doctor's job, and I'm going to do it. When the captain ordered me to

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send Panelli out, as his subordinate I should have obeyed. But not as a doctor. Am I fool for believing in the mandate of my work?

"That's what galls and enrages Captain Casey; the thought that someone claims another, not necessarily prior, authority, even if it's no more than an ideal," Simpson added dryly, "Not such a strange ideal, either. It's more a way of living."

"But why in hell should he want to smash the sick bay?"

"Well," said Simpson, "this ship is the captain's church, and he leads it." The doctor half smiled. "The sick bay is something he considers a heretic's altar."

Foster nodded. "I told you the same thing, now that I see what you mean. I told you the captain's the boss here."

"I never denied it. Anyway, I don't see that he can do anything much now. When his anger died down, he realized that wrecking the sick bay was no answer. He's got to find a new way to get at me, and I don't think he can."

"You mean you'll keep on this way?"

Simpson said quietly:

"I'll keep doing my job."

Simpson used the same words during dinner one day, in a conversation with Captain Casey. It was toward the close of the meal that Casey, sitting at the head of the officers' table, remarked, "Dr. Simpson?" with an odd inflection. "May I congratulate you on the growth of your practice?"

Simpson drew his breath in slowly. "Thank you, sir," he said. It meant that Casey had found out after all, and the crew would be more reluctant than ever now.

Presently the captain said, "I presume you've made out medical reports in every instance? I'd like to see them when we tie up in Cortez, if you don't mind."

The doctor put down his coffee and surveyed Casey. "I'll keep doing my job," he said.

To most of the men at the table, the conversation was an enigma, and the doctor's closing remark obscure and gratuitous; but there were several who understood. Chief Engineer McAllister, for instance, who had cut his hand on a can of grease, and asked Simpson to come to his quarters to sterilize and bandage it. When he'd thanked the doctor, his customary heartiness thinned a little and he said, "I'm not afraid of the old man, doctor, but I have to live with him. It'd be just as well if he didn't know you'd helped me."

Dr. Simpson had gained something after the night in the sick bay. Foster said the crew didn't understand it, but they liked him.

They liked him, but it was Foster who had to tell the doctor that Shorty Ryerson had a cough that kept him awake all night. And Simpson had to make a guess diagnosis on Sam Carey, because Carey wouldn't tell the doctor himself. He probably had cirrhosis of the liver: vomiting blood, constant retching, pain over the liver, but the best Simpson could do was send the second mate around with yeast tablets.

Captain Casey, however, had extended his congratulations at dinner, and the doctor realized Casey knew everything that went on aboard ship and Simpson acknowledged it. He knew there was nothing Casey could do. But then, he didn't expect any part of what happened in Puerto Cortez, on their eighth day out of New York.

THE *Typee* had come within a mile of the shimmering green shore of Puerto Cortez when she was hailed by a dilapidated motor launch. The ship cut her speed down and the launch drew up alongside. Four men climbed up the Jacob's ladder, all of them dressed in white. They were with Captain Casey for five minutes, and then the *Typee* cautiously moved toward shore and dropped anchor.

Dr. Simpson was sitting in the bow and reading, and from there he had watched the proceedings without great interest. He knew something was up, however, because for the first time he saw the first mate, Guernsey, on the bridge with the captain though it was not his watch. The four men were also there.

After several minutes more, one of the men left the bridge and walked to the bow. "I'm Roger Farrow," he said. "Welcome to Cortez, Dr. Simpson."

"Thank you, Dr. Farrow," Simpson said, shaking hands. "Only we don't seem to be in Cortez."

Farrow smiled. "For all practical purposes, the *Typee* is in Cortez," he said. There was a trace of an English accent in his speech. He was slightly taller than Simpson, and though his hair was entirely white, his sun-baked face looked strong and his eyes snapped.

Yet, despite his hardy appearance, there was an indefinable, almost incidental seediness about him; it might have been the result of nothing more substantial than the fact that he wore no tie, or the way he ignored the droplets of perspiration on his upper lip.

"Matter of fact, doctor," he said, "that's what I want to speak you to about. I want your advice."

Simpson couldn't resist a grin. Roger Farrow, he knew, had been the doctor at the Honduras shore office of Iverness Maritime for fifteen years.

"Ah," Farrow said happily, "I see you're amused. Good." He paused. "Dr. Simpson, we've a problem on our hands. I'll be very direct. It seems the health officials of the city claim they've discovered traces of *bacillus pestis* in the harbor."

"*What?*" Simpson started, and recovered immediately. "You mean bubonic plague?"

"We needn't use that term, doctor." Farrow looked distressed. He took out a handkerchief and mopped his forehead. "Though that, of course, is what I mean. There probably isn't a gram of sense in what they say, but they insist, and they've quarantined the harbor."

"Naturally. They'd have to."

"Yes and no, doctor. Yes and no. That is, if we could accept what they say, by all means, the quarantine. Matter of fact," he went on suddenly, "if the harbor's quarantined, the minute the *Typee* goes in, she won't be allowed out. And the wharves are piled twenty feet high with the banana crop. The fruit would rot long before quarantine was lifted. You see what I mean?"

"It's a problem, all right," Simpson said.

"It's a disaster," said Farrow, "but there is a way out. That's what I want your opinion on. Suppose some time tonight several barges were to come out here, carrying the fruit. We could unload the ship, take on the fruit, and pull out quietly in a day or two. Work only at night; the ship's out of sight around this peninsula here."

Farrow smiled triumphantly. "No fuss or feathers. The damned quarantine intact, the fruit saved, and all of you neatly dispatched on time. How does it strike you?"

Simpson lit a cigarette before he answered. "It doesn't

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strike me, doctor. How does it strike Captain Casey?"

"Frankly, he thinks the plan has merit. It's the only way of keeping the *Typee* on her schedule. Cortez is the only Atlantic port with facilities to service the ship. The only other Honduras port is Amapala, on the Pacific side. That means going down through the canal and back."

"And by then the fruit would rot? I see."

"Exactly. Now you should talk to Rico, the dock chief. He has the whole thing worked out. He knows officials and he can get us clearance papers from another port. They just wouldn't understand in New York. Banana republic; barefoot officials in bunches."

"Dr. Farrow," Simpson said, "I don't understand. Do you mean that you would help smuggle aboard contaminated cargo? Are you suggesting that I agree to that plan?"

"BUT there may not be one chance in a thousand that it is—" Farrow stopped. Captain Casey and one of the men from the launch were coming toward the bow. Casey stopped at the ladder, and the man climbed up. He was slender and dark, with a jaunty air.

Farrow looked annoyed. *"Que quieres aqui?"* he asked.

*"Tengo uno ideo magnifico,"* said the other softly.

*"Que es?"*

*"Si el medico sera al tierra algun tiempo, no tenemos la necessidad a fixar su fecha."*

Farrow puckered his lips thoughtfully. "Dr. Simpson, Senor Rico Roas y Sanchez," he said. Simpson took the limp hand the other offered. Roas smiled broadly. Most of his teeth were gold. He looked as if he bathed in oil.

"What is this about my going ashore and my signature being unnecessary?" Simpson said.

"My word!" Farrow jumped. "I had no idea you spoke—" He traced a fingertip across his lips. "It is a thought, though, and much the best. We'll have you come ashore. I'll file a report: you were ill, needed rest. Then you can have a holiday until the *Typee* returns. By then all this nonsense about the quarantine will be over."

"I don't understand."

"There's a formality, you see. If there's a doctor aboard ship, the Honduras officials insist that he countersign all clearance papers, certifying they were issued at the port designated on them."

Roas smiled. "Hondurans are zmart *hombres,*" he said. "We do not truzt our own officials."

"But if you're ill," Farrow said, "and not aboard the *Typee,* you're not remotely involved. Three weeks in Honduras can be a positive miracle."

I don't see how that changes things," said Simpson. "The cargo can't come aboard."

"You mean you'd tell them in New York?"

"I'm not thinking about New York. I might have bubonic in the sick bay by the time we got to New York."

"There wouldn't be any bu—there wouldn't be any, and you wouldn't be aboard the ship."

"But I would," Simpson said. "Of course I would."

Captain Casey called out, "Come along, Roger. You're wasting time." He was standing close enough to have heard every word.

Simpson started down the ladder. "Captain, I'd like you to understand my position."

"But I do, doctor," Casey said, and turned to Farrow and Roas. "Now, Rico, you'll go ashore with Sequilla—"

"I'm not leaving the ship, sir," Simpson broke in. His face was clouded and dull. "I don't want to make any trouble. I can't stand aside and let quarantined cargo come aboard."

Casey said, placidly, "You won't make trouble, doctor. This is my ship, and we'll load any cargo I like. Come along, Roger."

"No," Farrow said. "I think I'll stay for supper. Tell Sequilla I'll stay."

Casey walked away. Rico Roas bowed to Simpson, said, "Greatly pleazed to meet you," and hurried after Casey . . . .

DR. FARROW took out a silver cigar case and impatiently bit the end off a long black cigar. He stood at the rail with Simpson and puffed away. "Trouble, doctor," he said. The launch was pulling away from the *Typee* and Roas waved, then the other two dark-skinned men waved. "Trouble, definitely," said Farrow.

Trouble, definitely. Yes, Simpson could see it coming too; it seemed to him he had been waiting for this since that night in the sick bay, that it had been impossible for things to happen any other way.

"Why do you shake your head, doctor?" said Farrow.

It was quite dark already. They had finished supper half an hour before, and Farrow and Simpson had gone on deck together. In the east there was a narrow line of white-blue. A breeze came from the shore, bringing the smell of land.

"Did I shake my head?"

"You did." Farrow looked toward the east. "We have a three-hour twilight down here. Beautiful. Why don't you stay?"

"What will he do?" Simpson said. "I keep turning it over in my mind."

"You're wrong. Whatever you're thinking is wrong, because you don't know Casey." Dr. Farrow sounded different, somehow. Or was it that at all? Was it not perhaps, Simpson thought, stirring himself from his half bemused state, that Dr. Farrow was beginning to sound like *something?* He was taking on an identity; there had been none until now.

Dr. Farrow had amounted to nothing more than a man who had spoken for several minutes to Simpson that day; but now this impersonal man seemed to be coming alive. The difference lay in the note of urgency that had begun to sound in his words, Simpson reflected. "I know what happened between you on the way down here," Farrow said.

"I'd begun to wonder if you did know. What do you think, honestly?"

"Honestly?" Farrow said nothing for a minute. "I left my cigar case on the table," he said, finally. "Excuse me."

The pale streak on the sea had vanished. Somewhere on shore there was music. It sounded very gay. Simpson closed his eyes. "Pulse; 120," he said aloud. "Respiration; fast and shallow." It seemed so long ago.

## CHAPTER IV

### PRESCRIBED FOR DESTRUCTION

SHORTLY after six bells, from the darkness on the starboard side, there came the rhythmic, hushing sound of steam. A guarded voice hailed the *Typee.* A lantern showed immediately on the bridge. Several of the crew

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were on deck, swinging out the booms. In the quiet, even the gentle sound of the tug seemed loud.

Dr. Simpson went aft. A yellow beam of light flashed on the ship, and lanterns sprang into light on the sea. There was a string of barges behind the tug, the leading ones flat and empty, those behind dimly visible and piled high with canvas covering. Presently the first of them hit the starboard and subdued voices came from the barges.

"Mr. Guernsey," said Simpson, "the port is under quarantine. You can't load or discharge cargo."

"I'm following instructions, doctor," Guernsey said. "Stand aside, please."

Dr. Farrow appeared at Simpson's elbow. He took Simpson's arm firmly. "Doctor, you'll be a good deal better—" Simpson wrenched himself loose and ran to the rail. A man's head had appeared as someone from the barges climbed the Jacob's ladder. Simpson gripped the rail and shoved his hand into the man's face. The head fell from view, and from below a chorus of voices yelped.

"Doctor!" shouted Guernsey, running to Simpson. He held his hands away from his body, but he made no move. Instantly, the men from the holds directly below had begun clambering up on deck. "Doctor!" the first mate said again, "what in the name of hell are you doing?"

"Get back!" Simpson said harshly. "You're not going to take on any of that cargo." He stood there, facing Guernsey, while the shouting of the men on the barges kept up, and footsteps thudded on deck as Captain Casey came running together with others of the crew.

"You!" Simpson cried, turning on Casey when he saw him. "Tell them there'll be no loading." He was shouting at all of them, turning in a half circle. "You can't take that plague aboard!"

"Get out of here." Captain Casey's voice was a cold monotone as he walked toward Simpson. In the orange light of the lanterns, Simpson's face was impassive. "Throw that knife away before I break your arm off!" Casey had seen the long scalpel appear in Simpson's hand.

Simpson backed to the rail. "You won't load," he said.

Captain Casey stooped and picked up a crowbar.

"Casey!" Farrow cried. "Casey—stop it!"

Casey kept walking. "I'm going to break every bone in your body," he said. His voice was low and savage, his body bent forward. "Get below."

"Simpson, he'll kill you!" Farrow shouted, trying to hold back the captain. Casey jerked his arm away and sent Farrow sprawling with a push.

Simpson raised his hands, the scalpel in his right. His mouth was slightly open and he shook his head.

With a sudden thrust, the captain had lifted the crowbar and brought it down in a swift arc. It came down on Simpson's upthrust of his left arm, and the arm swung down and hung crookedly at the doctor's side. Casey was off balance, moving back, when Simpson lunged. Casey dropped to one knee and rolled over on the deck. The gleaming hyperbola of the scalpel missed him by a foot.

Simpson propped himself against the starboard rail again. His upper shoulder moved and his left arm dangled. In gasps, he said, "You won't—load," hardly able to speak. He had become covered with sweat.

The captain started toward him again, slowly raising the long crowbar. Someone cried out, "Stop him!" Farrow got in front of the captain and put both arms around him. "Guernsey! Foster!" he shouted. *"For God's sake, help me!"*

FOR an instant longer the paralytic quality of violence held, and suddenly shattered. Simultaneously, several of the crew leaped to clutch Casey. They pulled him away without a struggle. His hands went limp and the crowbar fell to the deck.

He sat down on a hatch and kept his eyes on Simpson. He had never taken them away, never uttered a sound.

Then, with ruthless swiftness, soundlessly Casey had seized the crowbar and made a headlong rush for Simpson. Simpson tried to duck back, and the iron bar caught his crippled arm against the railing. It rang out as it hit part of the rail and leaped from Casey's grip, to fall into the sea.

By then the men were on the captain again. They held him while he smashed at them in convulsive fury. His breath was spurting in great hoarse wheezes, and now and again he cried out in unintelligible passion as he fought. Little by little the men subdued him, and the paroxysm passed. They took him forward to the deckhouse.

Five minutes later, Dr. Farrow came up on deck. His coat had been half torn off his back, and his white hair was hanging over his face. When he approached Simpson, the young doctor raised himself from his crouch near the rail. "You too, Dr. Farrow," he said.

Farrow went to the rail and called out, *"Vamos, chicos!"* The men from the barges had all climbed the superstructure of the tug, from where they had mutely witnessed the struggle on the *Typee's* afterdeck. *"Vamos! No carga esta noche! Pagan la boca sobre toda esa!"* He added, "Understand, Rico? Tell them to keep their mouths shut!"

*"Cargan dios!"* a voice swore back.

The tug's steaming grew louder. The lanterns on the barges went out. Slowly the barges moved away, vanishing into the darkness that surrounded the *Typee.*

"All right, Dr. Simpson," said Farrow. He was holding his face in both hands. "They're gone. There will be no loading in Puerto Cortez." He came up to Simpson and took the scalpel. He cut open the left sleeve carefully, holding Simpson's arm up. Two white slivers of bone stuck out, the skin bloody where it had been pierced. "Compound fracture," Farrow said. "Probably radius and ulna."

"Probably?" Simpson snorted. He was as white as wax, and his arm trembled as Farrow held it. In the cold breeze, he was sweating . . . .

DR. FARROW looked up from the splints he was tying together. "Why don't you answer me?" he demanded. "What are you staring it? You haven't heard a word I've said."

Simpson said, mechanically, "You've been very kind. Thank you."

"Don't thank me. Don't thank me, please. Just listen to me. You've got to go ashore. I don't mean Casey. This is a bad fracture. I'm not the least bit satisfied with the way I've handled it. You've got to come ashore. Do you understand?"

Simpson nodded. "I'm going to get him. Remember what he said? He said he would break every bone in my body." The pain had worn him out. He sat listlessly, his eyes half closed, but there was a fire burning in them.

"Can't you forget that phrase?" Farrow looked anx-

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iously at Simpson. "What's the matter with you? You look like a madman. Simpson!" His voice was sharp again.

"I'll never forget the way he said it."

"You don't know what you're talking about. I'm sick of hearing you talk about it." Farrow got up and began to pace the deck of the sick bay. Then he stopped and brought his face close to Simpson's. "You've got to come ashore. I told you you didn't know him. You're in a life-and-death struggle if you stay on. There are no rules for Casey, no right or wrong. He follows the rules as long as he wins with them, *but he must win!* Don't you see? He'll win without the rules; but he'll win!"

"Let me think," Simpson said quietly.

Farrow ran his fingers stiffly through his hair and groaned. "You've gone crazy." He stood up dazedly. "Try to get some sleep. We can talk in the morning."

IT WAS early dawn when Dr. Farrow cautiously opened the door to Simpson's cabin. Simpson was sitting up in bed, smoking. "You've got to come with me, doctor," said Farrow. "The launch is back."

Simpson said, exhaling a long plume of smoke, "I'm staying."

Farrow sat down on Foster's empty bed. "Listen to me," he said. "Do you think I ordered those barges away last night? The orders were Casey's. He knew he couldn't hope to load secretly anymore. The news of that fight is all over the waterfront. The *Typee's* going to Amapala, to unload there. What more do you want? Come ashore. When the *Typee* returns, you can board her and go home."

Simpson lit a fresh cigarette from the butt he held. He shook his head silently, and shifted his broken arm to one knee. He hadn't undressed, hadn't even taken off his shoes.

"Simpson, can't I make you understand?" Farrow clenched his fists, and little muscles showed in his jaw. His eyes were haggard and bloodshot as he stared at Simpson. "Why do you think I stayed here yesterday after the launch left? Because I knew what was coming. I stayed with you, to make sure you weren't sent ashore unconscious. I know what's coming if you stay.

"You've only one arm now. If you're aboard when the *Typee* gets back, you won't be able to stop him any more." Farrow's voice was impassioned. "He'll see to it!" he said, shaking his hands. "He'll destroy you!"

Simpson threw a cigarette at Farrow. Farrow's hands trembled as he struck a match. "I've been thinking all night," Simpson said. "I think you're right about Casey. There are no rules for him."

"You do see it then? You know I'm right?" Farrow stood up. He sucked his breath in audibly. "Simpson, you're young. Maybe I'm not the man to speak to you. Maybe I've no right to; I'm no great example. But this once, listen to me."

"I didn't mean it that way," Simpson said slowly. "I want you to do something for me."

"What?"

"How long will it take us to get to Colon?"

"A little over two days."

"That's time enough," Simpson said. He took a crumpled bit of paper from his pocket, maneuvering awkwardly with his one free hand. Then he took out two twenty-dollar bills. "There's an address here," Simpson continued, "and money enough to pay for it." He hesitated momentarily.

"I want you to wire them. They've an office in New Orleans. The name is Peerless Pharmaceutical. Tell them to ship me the package air mail, deliverable to me, care of the ship at Colon. There are three separate things here. half a pint of croton oil; half a pint of oil of cantharides; fifty c.c.'s of parathormone, which is parathyoid extract in solution." He pushed the paper and the money into Farrow's hand.

The engines were starting. The deck vibrated and a loose hinge on the door chattered metallically. Dr. Farrow's face was inscrutable. The bloodshot eyes stared at Simpson, somber and intent. "Simpson," he said, "what are you thinking?"

"What I've been thinking all night." The smoke masked his face. He looked down at his broken arm. "The way he said it. I'll never forget it."

"Dr. Farrow!" someone shouted down the passageway. "We're raising anchor!"

## CHAPTER V

### KILL THE CAPTAIN!

THE heat came down upon the *Typee* suddenly that day, as if it had bided its time until now. A huge, fiery sun burned the decks and made the brass untouchable. Inside the cabins, the air was like steam. Dr. Simpson had fallen asleep some time after the ship had left Puerto Cortez, completely fatigued.

It was late afternoon when Captain Casey entered the doctor's cabin. He slammed the door and Simpson opened his eyes. He tried to sit up in bed, but he was too late.

Casey half sprang from the door to Simpson's cot. His eyes seemed pupilless and transparent. He grabbed Simpson's hair and battered his head against the bulkhead. He struck Simpson with both hands, heavy, brutal smashes with the full of his palms.

The doctor's head snapped from left to right as he tried to avoid the blows and couldn't. He was pinned in bed by the covering, and when he tried to free his feet, Casey punched him in the belly until he stopped moving. He kept hitting Simpson until the doctor's face was covered with blood and his eyes were closed from the swelling over them. Then he went out.

There hadn't been a sound from either man. Only the scraping of Casey's feet on the deck as he moved; the stinging, smashing sound of flesh on flesh; and once, the hard knock of the plaster cast when Simpson's sling tore and his left arm hit the bulkhead.

After a time, Simpson got out of bed. His legs buckled under him and he fell to the deck. He lay there until he was able to get up again, then he filled a basin with water from the sink and washed his face carefully. He was leaning against a bulkhead, facing the corner, when Foster came in; and he continued washing.

"Hello. I see you're up," Foster said. He took a cigarette from Simpson's pack on the chest and struck a match. "I've got news for you," he began to say, when Simpson turned around and reached for a towel. *"Doc!"* Foster cried out. The match burned his flesh as he stood there petrified, and he let it drop to the floor still burning.

Simpson took the towel away and looked at Foster from the thin line of his eyes. "I'm all right, Mr. Foster," he said. "Light me a smoke, please." A twisted smile came over his lips. "You see," he said, "there aren't any rules."

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. . . The two days were like a hideous dream. Foster stayed with Simpson all of his free time, and the two men sat in the cabin, stewing in the heat, unable to breathe the fetid air. There was no time, only the alternating daylight and darkness, the steady hum of the engines, the ship's gentle rolling. And the heat like a curse, spoiling the water, draining their strength.

Foster brought Simpson some food, lit his endless cigarettes, and talked to him when Simpson wanted to talk. But Foster's watch came again the second evening; and when he left, the captain came in and beat Simpson again.

Later, First Mate Guernsey came in with Foster. Guernsey kept his eyes averted as he spoke. "Leave the ship at Colon, Dr. Simpson," he said. Foster's cot had been overturned in the struggle, and he was righting it. The bedclothes were strewn about the room. Simpson was holding cold compresses to his nose, and it was impossible to see where he was looking, but he shook his head.

"He's told me his plans," Guernsey said. "The quarantine cannot legally be lifted for three weeks more. We will unload at Amapala, but we are coming back to Cortez for the next shipment from the interior. He intends to make it impossible for you to stop him again." He had a slow, precise way of talking, and each word came from his small mouth like a tangible thing. "What happened yesterday and today will continue. You must leave of your own accord."

"No," Simpson said, shortly. "There will be no loading at Cortez." He took his hand away from his nose. Thick mats of blood lay on his upper lip. "This time," Simpson said—and he actually grinned, though he looked like a monstrosity—"this time Captain Casey loses. There are rules, even in solitaire. I'm going to show him what happens when he forgets that."

THE *Typee* struck five bells on the midwatch in Colon, and the doctor was on deck. A fat moon had been half swallowed up by the sea, and its light was cold and brilliant. There was no wind in the harbor; the heat lay dormant on the city with its endless wooden buildings, pressing it down until it seemed that the restless buzzing which hung over it was a protest, but even that was tired and weak.

The sea sloshed listlessly at the *Typee's* sides as she moved at reduced speed, and the calm wake purled and glinted with moonlit phosphorescence. Simpson stood on the afterdeck and gripped the rail with all his strength.

Just before they entered the first of the canal locks, a small, heavily-wrapped package was delivered to the doctor. Hale, whose watch it was, handed it over without a word. Simpson watched the little motor boat chug away and went to the sick bay.

All the larger scissors and scalpels were gone; the locks had been broken on the cabinets. He put the three bottles from the package into the cabinet he had found when he first came aboard ship, and went back to his room. He was still wearing the clothes he had worn the day they came to Puerto Cortez. Now he took them off and went to sleep. Foster lay down again, mumbling to himself until he heard the deep rhythm of Simpson's breathing.

Toward noon of the next day, after the *Typee* had sailed past Balboa and into the Gulf of Panama, Simpson and Foster were eating in their cabin when they heard footsteps in the passageway. The captain's cabin was the first one off the passageway as one came from the deck, and the door that had opened was unmistakably his. Foster put down his plate and his face paled. "He's coming," he whispered to Simpson. "He thinks I'm at mess."

Simpson listened intently. The footsteps came down the passageway slowly, in Casey's heavy tread. They stopped just short of the door, then sounded again, but they were going away, out on deck. The doctor took a hungry bite out of a sandwich and spoke to Foster with his mouth full. "You know what Dr. Farrow would say?" he asked. "He'd say, 'trouble, definitely'."

Foster gulped and looked with distaste at his food, then inquisitively at Simpson. "*Now* what in the hell are you talking about?" he said, and he rubbed his jaw in apprehension. He was still listening for the steps to return, but Simpson kept eating.

"Got to keep my strength up," Simpson said between bites. "I made a nice showing yesterday. I hit him one on the head with this cast. Still," he added, pausing reflectively, "he may not be feeling up to it, today."

The second mate regarded the doctor silently. The sweat was pouring down Simpson's forehead, past a row of small, dark bruises spaced as closely together as knuckles, down into the still-open cuts over his eyes. He was battered and scarred and discolored, but it was not so much this as the unwavering brightness that seemed to shine through his barely opened eyes, that made him appear pathetic.

Foster brushed his face with a sticky hand. "Aaaaah," he sighed, shaking his head wretchedly, "aaaah, hell."

THE *Typee* was due west off Cape Blanco late the following day when the first mate knocked on the door of Simpson's cabin. Simpson had remained in his quarters since the time he had come on deck at Colon. When Guernsey entered, the choking, imprisoned heat of the room hit him like a blow.

"Thank you, doctor," he said, quietly, "I prefer to stand." He clasped his hands together and looked through the porthole. "I don't know whether you've heard about Captain Casey, lying here in this stink these two days. His face and hands are like raw meat. The salt air gets into his skin and he mauls his face. He's been drinking steadily since yesterday."

The mate opened his coat. "As far as I'm concerned, he can fall dead on the bridge, and welcome. But there is a lot of liquor left, and we're still far enough from Amapala to make the combination of his pain and his drinking something to think about. He's lying in the sick bay, up to his hair roots in alcohol, if you're interested."

Simpson put on his coat. "You know, Mr. Guernsey," he said as he followed the mate out, "if things hadn't worked out the way they did, I think I could have been happy aboard this ship."

"Thank you, doctor," Guernsey said. He never looked at Simpson when he spoke. "I wonder if the captain is too drunk to be able to express his gratitude." The precision of his speech gave the words an ironic shading that was perhaps not intended.

Captain Casey was sitting in the white chair he had thrown at the lights not so many days before. His head rested on an arm folded on the wooden table. His breathing was harsh and uneven and his eyes were closed. Even in the gloom Simpson could see the blisters that covered the captain's face. The skin over his cheekbones was gone, and under the thick stubble of unshaven beard his skin

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was inflamed. His hands looked as if they had been held over a fire. Simpson picked up one of the seared hands, examined it, and stood for awhile in thought.

He went to a cabinet and took out a hypodermic syringe. From a small package he took a vial and filled it with the contents of a bottle on one of the shelves in the old cabinet. Following Simpson's quiet instructions, the mate took off the captain's whiskey-stained coat and rolled up the shirtsleeve of his left arm, then rubbed alcohol under the biceps. Simpson had to rest his broken arm on the table when he sank the glistening needle into the captain's arm.

Casey's eyes opened. Dreamily, he watched the liquid in the syringe vanish, and when he looked up, his blood-streaked eyes met the doctor's. For seconds the two men stared at each other, until the mate touched Simpson's elbow.

That seemed to break the spell. The doctor withdrew the needle and spoke to Guernsey. "This is the beginning of an extraordinarily interesting phenomenon known as Von Recklinghausen's disease," he said, finding the words difficult to pronounce through his swollen lips. "It will need treatment every day."

"Naah!" It was more of a sullen, growling sound than a word. Casey pushed himself erect. "No!" he said loudly. "Nothing every—day—" He was twisting his dirty coat with his raw hands. "You think you'll—get away from me!" He took a step toward Simpson, swaying. His red-rimmed eyes were like bits of glass, and there was dried spittle on his lips. "You think—I'll come to you—now," he panted. Suddenly he swung the coat, bringing it down like a whip across Simpson's battered face. "Get back to your hole!" Casey spat out. Guernsey moved swiftly and caught the captain's arm before it could descend again. He held Casey until the doctor was gone.

Minutes later, Simpson heard a clamor on deck. Men were running aft from the fo'c'sle and bridge, and for a while there was incoherent shouting echoing through the ship. Then Foster burst into Simpson's cabin, his mild, thin face feverish, his mouth working loosely.

"Doc!" Foster cried, "Guernsey just tried to kill the old man!"

*"What?"*

"Yeah. With a scissors." Foster half fell to his bed. He held his head in his hands. "Someone heard them shouting at each other. When we broke in the door to the sick bay, the old man had Guernsey on the floor, unconscious."

"Where is Guernsey now?"

"They locked him in the brig. The old man's on the bridge." Foster groaned. "Doc," he said, hopelessly, "I'm leaving the ship at Amapala. I can't stand it."

## CHAPTER VI

### THE LAST PATIENT

THE *Typee* docked at Amapala twenty hours later, in the middle of the night, with Captain Casey on the bridge. His face was no longer as raw as it had been. His hair was neatly brushed, and he stood stiffly at the bridge rail in spotless white. When the ship tied up, he watched First Mate Guernsey cross to the pier as he left the ship, and then retired for the night.

Early in the morning, when the captain went ashore, Dr. Simpson went to the galley and had a leisurely breakfast. When he came out, he found Dr. Farrow standing amidships, watching the *Typee* unload. Dr. Farrow surveyed Simpson grimly. "Well, doctor," he said, "experience has left its mark on you."

Simpson grinned. "All the way across Honduras for the sake of that observation?" he asked, shaking hands.

"No," Farrow said, incisively. "An errand of mercy. That's the term, I believe?" He snapped his silver cigar case shut, and he swept the ship with his dark eyes. "Let's get ashore," he said. "I've a few things to tell you. Don't worry—the damned ship'll be in the damned port when you get back."

. . . From the high green cliff the placid, simmering sea stretched away endlessly. Below, between the cliff and the sea, a little village squatted and sweltered in the sun. Its unpainted shacks and colored tile houses formed a bright mosaic which was held together by interlocking shadows that looked like black pools of oil.

A man and a small boy were leading three burros up a dusty, winding road, and the boy whistled beautifully to a solitary bird that circled in the cloudless sky. Farrow and Simpson sat on the running board of the ancient Durant phaeton that had served as their taxi, and watched their half-naked driver try to roll a cigarette.

". . . and when I looked up from the card table," Farrow was saying, "I saw Guernsey at the hotel desk. Naturally, he'd come to the only hotel in town looking for a doctor. Two o'clock in the morning, and Guernsey looking for a doctor, with his hands trying to keep his nose from falling apart. Because your Captain Casey wouldn't allow him to come to you, you see."

Farrow traced a pattern on the ground with his sandal. "I don't know what he'd done if I hadn't been there. There is no doctor in Amapala at present. There were two last week, but one of them ran off with the other's wife, so the one who was left behind blew his brains out and had a funeral with a ten-piece band. Well, I patched up Guernsey's nose and he left for Nicaragua. Said he knew some people in Corinto, I think it was."

"You mean he left the ship for good?"

"My word, it was good. And why not? Didn't Foster sneak off this morning?"

"How do you know?"

"I've seen Casey."

"Oh," Simpson said.

"Yes, 'oh.' All the damned 'ohs' you want. I've seen him and if he finds anyone in Amapala who can identify skin burns from croton oil, you're as good as dead. And I very well mean dead." Farrow looked intently at Simpson. "Would you mind telling me exactly what you were trying to do?" He waved a hand at Simpson's face. "Revenge for the—experience?"

Simpson shook his head and was silent. "Any new developments on the quarantine?" he asked, at length.

"None, aside from several post mortems I attended," Farrow said, in a leaden voice. "Bubonic; all of them. The harbor's officially shut, but once or twice a week they'll be loading around the peninsula." He looked out at the sea. "That's why you're getting off the ship. You've a clear case. First and second mates left. The captain beat the doctor into submission, and the first mate tried to kill the captain, partly because he couldn't stand by any longer, partly because—"

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"What?" Simpson said. "You mean Guernsey tried to kill Casey because of me? Why don't you finish?"

"There's no finish. Casey radioed that he wasn't taking on any cargo at Amapala. That means he's going back to Cortez."

Simpson's teeth gritted imperceptibly. "Like hell he's going back. What is this about Guernsey?"

"Will you stop those blasted questions?" Farrow snapped. "I'm no clairvoyant. Guernsey didn't trust me, and rightfully. You shouldn't trust me either."

"Why not?" Simpson said quietly. "You haven't asked me what I'm doing with the parathormone. And you've medical texts at home." He half sighed as he went on, "No, we both knew that Casey was going back to Cortez. I remember what you said the morning we left Cortez: 'If you're aboard when the *Typee* gets back, you won't be able to stop him any more.'

"No, we both knew, and had no doubts. Casey has been playing his game since then, and so have I been playing mine. He dealt the cards; I'm still standing pat. There will be no loading at Cortez."

Simpson watched the driver clumsily spilling tobacco over himself, and reaching into a pocket he threw him a package of cigarettes he had bought in town. The driver's face lit up and he cried voluble thanks.

"He's been waiting for that," Farrow said sourly. "He can roll them like a machine, the humbug."

"I can't smoke them anyway. Too strong."

"You give up very easily, don't you?" Farrow said dryly, rising. "Let's go back to town. You've got that crazy look on you again."

"Have I?" Simpson said.

THE *Tepee* left Amapala with her holds empty, her bow riding high, whipping the sea aside in long, sleek rollers. Through the dead heat and a dead sea she made her way south. All day the deck was silent. In the mess room there was little talking. The figure of Captain Casey stalked the ship.

The captain came into Simpson's cabin an hour after the ship had sailed. He held several folded papers which he threw on the bed that had been Foster's. "Doctor," he said, "those are clearance papers, from Amapala, stating that the *Typee* took on her cargo there. I want you to sign them and bring them to my quarters." He paused. "The longer you delay," he said coldly, "the more I will like it."

"You should enjoy the voyage, sir," Simpson said. He made himself comfortable against a pillow, and added, "What would you say, Captain, if I told you I had wired to New York and informed them of your—"

Curtly, Casey interrupted. "You're not the type."

"Then we do understand each other, at last." Simpson took a long inhale on an ever-present cigarette.

"What are you staring at?" Casey said. He held his hands up, palms open. "Do you think I require your expert attention? Here," he said softly, and smashed the back of his right hand against Simpson's face. Again and again he struck the doctor, until his still raw hands were cracked and bleeding.

That night, Hale, the third mate, came to Simpson's cabin. There was no light, and he addressed Simpson, facing Foster's bed. He mumbled in a subdued way. ". . . be so good as to do what is necessary to make it operate, and I will do the rest."

The doctor turned up the light. From the several bottles that Hale had brought, Simpson took one and filled the hypodermic. "Rub the biceps with alcohol first," he said. "Don't jab with the needle; break the skin and slide it in."

"Thank you, doctor," Hale mumbled. He was just a little older than Simpson, a small, frightened man who was growing stout. "I appreciate this very much. I hope you realize I am merely obeying orders."

Simpson nodded and put out the light.

That day was the last time Casey came to Simpson's cabin. Now and again, Casey's footsteps would sound in the passageway, but he never again came in. Several times Simpson saw the captain, but that happened most frequently on the first days of the voyage back to Puerto Cortez.

For, as the days passed, the captain left his quarters less and less frequently, seldom stirring from them for more than an hour. Then he would emerge and take the bridge, standing under the awning. Carefully he would examine the charts and indicate a hair's difference between the compass mark and the lubber's line. A moment in the strong sun, sighting with the sextant. Then, having said no more than a word during the hour, he would return to his cabin.

His skin bore only traces of the blisters and burns that had been there; but there was pale fire in his eyes, and a deadly deliberateness in all his movements.

Coinciding with his retirement, Dr. Simpson gradually emerged from the deckhouse, spending the days baking in the sun on the poopdeck. Twice a day, Hale went with him to the sick bay and had the hypodermic prepared. Little by little, Hale was wearing down. He was standing two and three watches at a time, and occasionally the bosun would take the bridge at night to spell him, morbidly interested in the progress of the ship.

Otherwise, the voyage was quiet and without incident. One day McAllister, the chief engineer, sat with Simpson for a while on the poop. Simpson had been glancing over something that looked like clearance papers, but McAllister didn't ask. He was no different from the rest, though he was bolder. When the others saw Simpson, they always looked at him carefully, watching his broken face heal; McAllister had come closer to look. He had nothing to say.

PAST Colon, Sam Carey came to the sick bay with the doctor, and later agreed to stay in the fo'c'sle on the sick list. The cirrhosis had developed liquid. The long-range diagnosis had been accurate, but he was beyond yeast now, and fear of treatment had allowed it to happen. But it seemed as if fear had died away. Sam Carey was on the sick list, and nothing happened.

And then, one day from Puerto Cortez, the crew knew that the captain was drinking again. It became apparent that the fear which had sailed with the ship for almost twelve days had only been lying dormant. It was like a thing alive, sleeping while the captain slept, waiting for the moment of its awaking.

Now a fever ran through the ship. She was like someone ill, and the illness affected everyone aboard. Hale stood the watches alone most of the time, though they said he sometimes talked to himself. He would mumble that the captain wasn't feeling well, that he hadn't touched his food. His concern was a strange one, a child-like attachment to something he feared.

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He came to Simpson once, and saw the clearance papers serving the doctor as a bookmark. He went away without saying anything, only to return and ask for the hypodermic.

"You would be amazed to see him, doctor," Hale said. "He is always drunk, but he keeps himself very clean. He shaves by himself, and his hands aren't steady, but he doesn't cut himself."

He kept looking this way and that, throwing his weight from one foot to the other as he kept speaking. "Today he asked me if I could see anything wrong with him, but I couldn't. What do you think it is, doctor? No one can run the ship as well as he does. He hasn't even checked our course all day. What do you think it is, doctor? He looks so well, and yet . . ."

Swiftly, the *Typee* sailed to Puerto Cortez with her holds empty.

Sunday at noon, a moment after the afternoon watch had come on, Captain Casey took the bridge and raised the peninsula that jutted out from the harbor of Puerto Cortez. He himself gave the order to stop the engines. After soundings, the anchors plunged into the sea and their cables sang. Then the master of the *Typee* descended from the bridge and slowly started walking to the poopdeck.

He wore spotless white. His hair was brushed back and his face was freshly shaved and glowing. In one hand he carried his cap, holding it away from his body. When he climbed up the poopdeck, Dr. Simpson put away his book and stood up.

"Did you sign the clearance papers, doctor?"

"I'd have brought them to you if I had," Simpson said quietly. "I can't sign those papers because this ship won't load anything from this port. I've said so before."

Casey's glance never wavered. The cap he held in his left hand fell to the deck.

"Don't, sir," said Simpson.

But Casey's hands had closed and he had taken a step toward the doctor. The instant he closed in, Simpson pulled his broken arm close to his body, and his right arm stabbed into the captain's chest. A short, sharp cry burst from Casey, almost covering the snapping noise that had preceded it by an instant.

Then he surged forward, and again Simpson brought his body around, burying his fist in the captain's side. This time Casey went down on the deck, hitting a kneecap as he half spun to break his fall. There was a faint clicking sound as he struck the deck. He fell over on one side and violently moved an arm to stay his fall. The arm shivered and gave, and the captain lay full length on the deck.

"Don't move, sir," Simpson said, standing over him. Casey's face had gone white. He was gulping in air with his mouth wide open. Half the immaculate uniform was covered with a film of dirt. "Don't try to move, sir," Simpson said. "You'll have to be carried to your quarters." He stood rigidly, his face as pale as the captain's.

Casey closed his eyes in pain and tried to lift himself with his other arm. He clutched the rail and pulled. A series of brittle snaps sounded, and his hand fell limply to the deck. Simpson got down on his knees beside the captain and took one of his hands in his own. He took the left little finger and applied pressure. It snapped in his hands.

"Do you see, sir?" he said, very softly. "I could break every bone in your body." Casey's eyes remained closed. He had lapsed into unconsciousness. Then Simpson took the short blue automatic out of the captain's coat pocket and hid it before he stood up again.

THE sun poured in through the portholes, and the large cabin seemed very cheerful. The bulkheads were covered with the pictures of ships on which Casey had sailed. Over his desk the *Typee* was framed, painted against a tropical sea in brilliant colors.

Dr. Simpson sat by the bed, holding the captain's pulse. The captain's eyes were open. He was staring at the overhead. After a while, Simpson got up and went to a medicine cabinet that hung on a bulkhead.

"Tomorrow I'll begin setting the fractures, sir," he said. "I want to give your body a chance to recover a little." He took out a bottle of shaving lotion and emptied it down the drain. Then he sat down again beside Casey.

For a long time he kept looking at the captain. It was very quiet, and when four bells sounded, it seemed as if the vibration had sought out the silent cabin. Then Simpson began talking.

"I hope you'll understand this some day," he said. "These last two days, thinking about it, it seems to me that I must have been crazy. But I know that I would do it again if I had to."

There was no sign that Casey was listening; he had closed his eyes as Simpson went on. "You see, the hypodermic contained a hormone taken from the parathyroid gland. Do you remember how I told Mr. Guernsey that you were at the beginning of Von Recklinghausen's disease? I didn't mean the burns on your hands and face. I meant that I was beginning to give you the disease, artificially.

"It came to me the night you broke my arm. I couldn't forget that you had said you would break me to bits before you were through. I couldn't get it out of my mind; and later, I thought of this. I duplicated what a tumor of the parathyroid will do; increased the amount of the hormone in your blood. That upset the calcium balance. What it did, actually, was suck the calcium from the bone to the blood stream. It brought on what doctors in their wisdom call a cystica condition.

"I burned you with croton oil on your soap and shaving brush, and I put cantharides in your shaving lotion. You had told me to stay in my cabin, and it wasn't difficult to cross the passageway and come in here. I knew you would be so badly burned you would have to come to me."

Simpson smiled ruefully. "Yes, they told us once, a long, long time ago, that people eventually came either to doctors or to undertakers . . . . But when I gave you the first injection of parathormone, the burning died away. That was because you had washed off most of the oil from the soap and brush. Then, when you shaved each day, the cantharides in the lotion irritated your skin again, and that kept you asking for the injections."

Simpson paused and listened to Casey breathing. "Today, you see, I could have carried out your threat," he said softly. "Now I realize that—" The captain was breathing heavily, in a long deep inhale; his eyes were shut. Simpson got up and went to the door.

Just as he reached the door, the doctor heard the noise behind him. He ducked instantly, and the water pitcher hit the door over his head and shattered into long slivers. The captain held his side in pain and slowly lay down again. His eyes were open and he stared at nothing.

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Before the *Typee* sailed again, Dr. Farrow came aboard. He went to see the captain and then spoke to Simpson for awhile.

"There's something I ought to tell you, doctor," Farrow said. "You may not have known that I didn't possess a single medical volume until two days ago. I ordered it after we spoke that day in Amapala. Until then, I didn't know what I had done when I sent for the three things you wanted. I was ashamed to ask to borrow a book from anyone." He sighed. "Now I know that you might have killed him," he said.

"Yes," Simpson said. "Either his health would have carried him through to a point where his bones would break before the dosage killed him, or—" He shrugged. "Either I would have signed his clearance papers or he would have killed me. I knew it and I took the chance. I gave him an average of six c.c.'s a day."

"I was right when I said there was murder aboard this ship."

Simpson nodded.

"And now?"

"Now," Simpson said, "the *Typee* won't load. Mr. Hale will take the ship back to New York. Maybe he thinks he can't do it, but New York is eight days and a million light years from Puerto Cortez. I think he'll find out a lot in eight days."

He smiled as he shook Farrow's hand in farewell. "Yes," he said, "Mr. Hale will bring the ship in, and I'll take care of Captain Casey. He's just another patient now, and I'll keep doing my job."

* * *

"WELL, now," Buchanan said to me after he had finished, "you look immersed in thought."

I said, "Drowned is a better word."

"Did you like it?" He laughed. He filled his pipe for the third time and kept looking at me all the while.

"It'll do," I said shortly. But I had to ask him more. I couldn't let it go. "What happened when they got back to New York?"

"Nothing much. Casey went to a hospital and stayed there a month, and then he went back to the *Typee*." His expression became a bit more serious. "But something did happen to Casey in another way. He was a changed man from then on. That voyage and what happened on it did something to him. I don't know. Maybe that one taste of defeat gave him a better slant on what victory was meant to be."

He puffed away at the pipe, making a wry face. "But I'll tell you this," he said. "He never told anyone what happened to him, and it was due to him that Iverness adopted its present medical policy. When he was well again, he shipped with Simpson for more than a year. Yes," he mused, "they got to be very friendly indeed."

I kept thinking about it. "And Casey, you mean to say, recovered completely?"

"Completely. Oh yes," Buchanan said, putting the pipe down on his desk. "This little finger that he broke when I was lying on deck"—he was holding out his left little finger and it was crooked—"never did heal properly. I used to look at it all the time I was in the hospital, and—"

That was when he saw the way I was looking at him.

"Hell," he said, trying to keep from smiling, "I had to call him something. Don't look at me that way. You know you wouldn't have enjoyed the story—I couldn't very well talk about myself, and Casey is just a good a name as—"

Well, I was laughing too by then, so it didn't matter. I went to dinner with them that night, in case you're interested. It was a good dinner.

THE END

*A bright thought for the lad in camp*

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The two flyers, peering through the floor cracks, saw the Frenchwoman calmly fire at her husband

# His Sword Is Rust

## By Borden Chase

*Author of "Farewell to the Indies," "Crooked Caribbean Cross," etc.*

**The moving story of a farmer in France who, standing quietly on the land he loved and had lost, wrote his defiance in the sky**

THE LIGHTS were there. Three of them, spaced about five hundred feet apart to form a broken L. They were brave lights. Desperately brave. Flight Lieutenant Tindall took his hand from the control column long enough to toss a salute to the unknown friend far below.

"Three hundred miles to London," he said quietly over the intercom.

"Three hundred miles it is, sir," answered Sergeant Davis. "I see as 'ow our friend still tends 'is lights. Nervy devil, that one."

"He's all of that," agreed Tindall.

The crippled Hampden banked slowly and changed course above the lights. Tindall had brought her to the River Allier on 300. Now he swung to 335 and headed directly for London and home. Below, the French countryside rolled its low hills to the dark horizons. They were beautiful in the night-glow. Peaceful. There was no war in these hills. No war for the men who tilled them.

France was beaten and her sons had put aside their guns. They'd put aside their freedom. Some said they had put aside their courage, but that was a lie. Lieutenant Tindall knew it was a lie. Here in Moulins, where the fist of the conqueror was hardest, at least three sparks of courage shone brightly.

Tindall had first noticed them during an early raid on Turin. Curious, he had nosed the big Hampden down for a closer look. One light came from the window of a thatch-roofed farm house and splashed a yellow glow across the cobbled yard. Fanning out at a wide angle were two others that shone from a pair of small outbuildings.

The first pointed a slender finger toward Italy. The second pointed toward London. It was a perfect beacon although no word of it had come from Intelligence. No word from Headquarters. But other flyers had noticed the lights and many a toast was drunk in Tindall's mess to the unknown farmer of Moulins.

"I'm glad 'e waited up for us," said Davis.

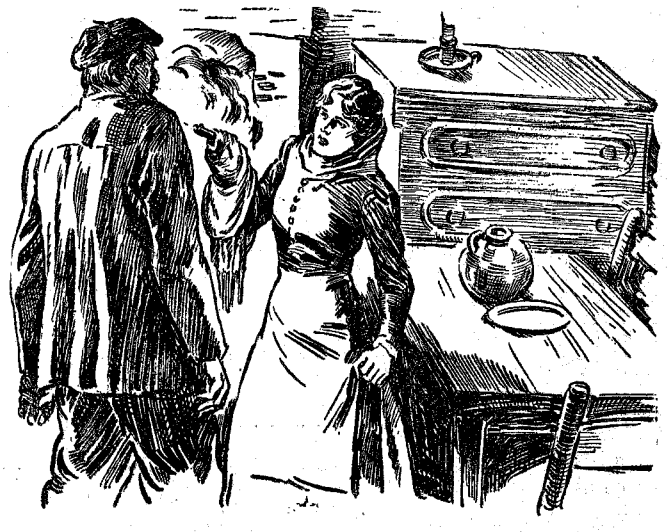
"He always has."

"That's what worries me, sir. The Germans have eyes as well as we."

"I know," said Tindall.

"Wonder 'ow long before they get 'im?"

Lieutenant Tindall didn't answer. He didn't like to think of what would happen to that French farmer when he was caught. The Germans would stand for no nonsense





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north of Moulins. This was their ground now. They'd give short shrift to any Frenchman who set beacons to guide British flyers on their bombing raids.

Automatically he glanced at his instrument board. It did him no good. They'd caught it heavy over Turin this time and the big Hampden was a wreck—one motor dead, the other limping. A shell fragment had ruined the instrument board and machine-gun fire had raked the ship from end to end.

Tindall knew he was carrying two dead men in the gunners' compartments. He leaned wearily on the control column and wondered how the ship had managed to keep aloft during the two-hundred-mile flight from Turin. He wondered if that single motor would take them the rest of the way home. Then he stopped wondering and nosed down in a wide bank. The second motor had cut out.

"I guess that's it, Davis," he said.

"There's a field near the lights, sir."

"We'll try for it."

THERE was no moon, but the hills were soft in the blue-gray glow. Off to the south a line of tall trees marked the road that led to the River Allier. Beyond was Moulins, garrisoned by Germans. Perhaps they'd seen the big plane. Perhaps not. It made little difference.

Tindall knew he could expect no help from the French of this district. They'd have to turn him in. That, or watch their homes go up in flames when the gray-clad men caught them giving aid to an enemy. Still, there was the farmer who had shown courage enough to keep those three lights burning. His field was just ahead.

"Watch it, Davis," said Tindall. "We're sitting down."

"Here's luck, sir."

The wheels touched a burned-over field and sent a black dust cloud swirling about the wings. The ship rolled to a stop and Tindall unfastened his belt. There was an automatic in the pilot's compartment. Tindall smiled a little as he dropped it into his tunic pocket. Not much good in a spot like this, but it made a man feel better.

"Let's have a look about," he said, and unplugged the wires of the intercom.

Sergeant Davis crawled from his cramped quarters at the bomb sight and followed his flight lieutenant over the plane wing. For a time both men stood on the black earth and said nothing.

The field ended at a low stone fence and beyond was a dirt road that led to the farm buildings. They were dark now. The three friendly eyes that had helped Tindall so many times in the past were closed. There was no movement in the cobbled yard nor in the outbuildings. A vague stillness hung over the farm. Even the bare branches of the trees that lined the road were quiet.

"Enough to give a man the creeps," said Davis quietly. "Do you think we can get through to the south, sir?"

"We can try," said Tindall.

"Aye—we can try." Davis fumbled for a cigarette. He got one halfway to his mouth and his hand stopped. "We've a visitor, Lieutenant."

It was then Tindall saw the man standing near the tail of the plane. He was a big man with a heavy beard that covered the lower portion of his face. It was a black beard, tangled and unkept. He wore no hat and his arms were folded over a rough blouse that hung below his hips. His trousers were those of the French peasant and his shoes were of wood. He studied the two fliers silently.

"*Bon soir, m'sieur,*" said Tindall in his text-book French. "*A qui ai-je l'honneur de parler?*"

"My name is Novak," answered the farmer. The words were slow, as though called back to memory from a distant past. "My name is Peter Novak."

"You're English?"

"French," said the farmer. He pointed to the plane. "How long before you can get that going?"

Tindall shrugged. "One motor is a wash-out, I'm afraid. We might patch the other in an hour or two. It takes both to get off."

The bearded man looked toward the east where the first streamers of dawn were reaching into the sky. He moved his shaggy head from side to side and turned to walk toward one of the outbuildings. His steps were the long, firm strides of a powerful man, but his shoulders were bowed as though he carried some heavy yet invisible weight.

Tindall waited. So did Davis. In a few moments the farmer returned carrying two short ladders. He set them against the leading edge of a wing near the motor.

"See what you can do," he said. "You got maybe an hour if they didn't see you in town."

"Suppose they catch you helping us?" said Tindall.

"The road doesn't open till morning," said the farmer. "See what you can do with those motors. It's worth the chance."

TINDALL would have argued, but the man's manner prevented it. He wasn't surly. Neither was he particularly friendly. His voice was flat. The voice of a man whose thoughts are distant, and like his face it carried a grim determination. For a time he stood there stolidly watching Tindall and Davis as they unshipped the motor covering. Then he climbed over the wing and, with no word to either, went into the cabin.

Tindall almost forgot him. A shell splinter had knocked one carburetor out of line and pinched the gas feed. But it would stand fixing. Tindall was sure it would stand fixing. And soon Davis, who had climbed to the other wing, was calling that a few bits of wire salvaged from the instrument panel might repair the ignition on the port motor.

"How long?" called the farmer.

Tindall looked down. The bearded man had come out of the plane and was standing near the door. He was a grotesque figure in the half-light. A monstrous figure. Balanced on each of his heavy shoulders was the still form of a man. The farmer held them easily as he looked up at Tindall.

"How long?" he asked again.

Tindall ignored the question. "Where are you taking my gunners?"

"Just over the hill."

"Decent burial?"

The shaggy head nodded. "They'll be in good company."

He walked off into the night carrying his burdens. Logic kept Tindall from calling him back. War logic. The gunners had done their bit for England. Now they were dead weight that might keep the Hampden from reaching London.

He turned back to the motor and worked. Worked furiously. Davis matched his pace. Between them they stripped short lengths of wire from the cabin and used them to repair the torn ignition. The carburetor came next. A mean job. Night slipped quietly off into the west as

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they worked and morning crept in to take its place. Tindall was hardly conscious of the change. Nor did he see the long, straggling line that moved north along the river from Moulins.

It was a pitiful line; ragged men who carried bundles and ragged women who carried children. The old were there, too. And the young. They walked quietly because the older ones had forgotten how to sing. The children had forgotten how to play. This was France—all that was left of it. A beaten France that must return again to ruined farms and plow and plant and reap the harvest that would fill the mouths of her conquerors.

"How long?" asked the farmer. He was watching the road carefully now.

"Twenty minutes," answered Tindall. "Half an hour at the most."

"You can't make it. Better come down, both of you."

"Why?"

"There's a car on the road. That means Germans."

"You're sure?"

"Only Germans ride nowadays," said the bearded man. "Better come down."

Tindall didn't complain. Things like this happened in the war. Luck had a way of swinging toward you for just so long; then it turned. He climbed down from the motor, wiped his hands and passed the rag to Davis. The sergeant pointed to the ladders.

"Best hide 'em, Novak," he said. "Aid to the enemy an' all that, you know."

The farmer picked up the ladders. "I know."

"I should imagine you would," added Tindall. He smiled a little as he put out his hand. "Thanks a lot, Novak. You've been a help."

The bearded man looked across the outstretched hand into Tindall's eyes. "What are you going to do?"

"Burn the plane and head south."

"You won't get ten miles."

"No?"

Peter Novak shook his head and pointed toward the road. "Three British flyers tried it last week. Borrowed clothes from a farmer and tried to slip through the lines. They were caught and taken to Moulins."

"Go on," said Tindall. "Let's have the rest."

The words were a dull rumble between the bearded lips. "It was Sunday. Sunday morning. The people of the district were ordered to gather in the square before the *hôtel de ville*—the gray building with the wide steps. There were five gallows in the square. They hung the flyers. They hung the farmer who helped them. They hung his wife."

"Then—you don't think we'll get through?"

"You won't get ten miles," said the farmer again. He nodded toward the huge bombing plane. "Don't burn it. Leave it as it is and come up to the house."

THE flyers followed him across the blackened field. At the crest of a low hill Tindall turned to look south. Peter Novak had been right. A car was following the bend of the river, scattering the line of pedestrians on the road from Moulins.

Soon Tindall and Davis would be in that car. Soon they'd be in a German prison camp. Tindall frowned. If those swine hadn't hung that farmer and his wife it would be worth risking the gallows to reach the line.

"Sporting of you to burn those lights," he said to the farmer. "They're a great help."

"Are they?"

"Yes," said Tindall. "We'd have lost four bombers and their crews if it weren't for your beacon."

"That's good. Good I can still help."

"How did you happen to think of it?"

"I watched you fellers turn off over my place. Figured you were headed for Italy. When I got the course I built another barn and put a light in it."

"You're taking a chance, Novak. Suppose you get caught?"

"Suppose I do?" said the farmer quietly.

He rested the ladders against an outbuilding and crossed to the white walled house at the far side of the cobbled yard. It was a pretty place. Neat and orderly. The yard was clean swept and the path to the farther outbuilding was bordered with flower beds. Tindall noticed a few late blossoms were still on the stalks. He touched one with his finger tips as he followed the farmer to the door of his home. Peter Novak rested one wide hand on the latch and turned to face the flyers.

"Suppose I do get caught?" he asked again.

Tindall hadn't noticed his eyes before. Now he looked directly into them and found bitterness. Bewilderment was in them, too. As the man stood at the door of his home he reminded the flyer of some shaggy bear, newly trapped in the forest and penned in a narrow cage. There was no fear in this man. Tindall could speak the truth.

"That gray building with the wide steps," he said quietly. "You mustn't forget that Germans own this ground."

"Germans," said the farmer, and the word was flat. He lifted one heavy arm and moved it in a circling gesture. "I fought for this ground, soldier. Twenty years ago, I fought for this ground. I liked it so I stayed here and built me a farm. Then they came and tried to take it away from me. So I fought 'em again. Fought 'em good, soldier—we fought good!"

His shoulders weaved and he rolled his huge head from side to side. That cruel bewilderment plucked at the corners of his eyes. "We fought good, soldier, but something—something was wrong. It wasn't like before. They told us to give way—they ran an' left us—just left us."

"I know," said Tindall.

"Do you know, soldier?"

Tindall nodded. He'd patrolled the air lanes during that ghastly retreat to the Channel ports. He'd flown above men like Peter Novak—bewildered groups of fighting men deserted by their leaders and left to face an overwhelming enemy. Men who dug into the ground of France and turned their puny rifles against steel-clad tanks, dive bombers and chattering machine guns. These were the real soldiers of the Republic.

"Believe me—I know," he said again.

"Then why did you leave us? Why did you all run away and leave us? We'd have fought, soldier. We'd have fought till we died."

Tindall's smile was slow. "You would have fought—that's true, Peter Novak. *You* would have fought till you died. But there weren't enough Peter Novaks in the army of France. There were none among her generals—her statesmen. We had to retreat or lose England. Would you ask us to do that, Peter Novak?"

"Maybe you're right," said the shaggy man. "About losing England—maybe you're right. A man mustn't lose his country."

Lieutenant Tindall put out his hand. This time the

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farmer of Moulins accepted it. Then he opened the narrow door of his home and motioned to the flyers. Tindall shook his head.

"It might be better," he said,"if Davis and I waited in the yard. I'll tell them you refused to hide us."

"You'll come into my house," said the farmer. It was almost an order.

THEY followed him across the threshold. It was a simple home with an earthen floor. Peter Novak's hands had built the long table that stood near the fireplace. They'd built the reed bottomed chairs and the closets and shelves.

But other hands had covered these shelves with oilcloth and stacked them with bright pottery plates of blue and yellow and red. They'd hung a half-dozen cups from hooks above the lower shelf where each reflected its little crescent of light from a tall bronze lamp. And it was these same hands that had worn smooth the rails of an old crib set well back in a corner. A woman's hands.

She stood silently beside the fireplace. Once she had been pretty. Now she was beautiful. The years had brought a few light streaks to her dark hair and mellowed the lines of her body. Her throat was slender and her mouth was firm. Her eyes caught Tindall's and held them. Gray eyes that were brave without being hard. Perhaps tears had softened them. Madam Novak looked like a woman who knew sorrow well.

"You will have tea," she said and turned toward the earthen crock that stood on an iron range. Her English was slow. "Sit down. I bring tea to you. That will be good, so?"

Before Tindall could answer Peter Novak crossed the room and caught his wife's arm. For a moment he talked quickly in the flowing patois of the Allier Valley. She listened. Then answered tersely. Her words were too swift for Tindall, but he caught their meaning when the farmer pulled the table beneath a trapdoor in the wooden ceiling. The lieutenant lifted a hand in protest.

"Sorry, Novak," he said, "I can't let you do it. If we're caught it means the gallows for you and your wife."

"We know that," said the bearded man. "But they need flyers in England. They need them bad and we're sending you back."

"There isn't a chance!"

"I wouldn't say that, soldier."

"No," said Tindall slowly. And he smiled again. "Your breed never do."

Novak shrugged. "They don't think that way at Vichy."

"I wasn't talking of the French," said Tindall. He motioned to Davis and climbed to the table.

The sergeant followed him up through the trapdoor. A few thin streamers of light found their way between the ceiling boards and made yellow columns in the darkness. Tindall knelt above one. Below him the room was a stage. He watched Peter Novak cross to a closet near the fireplace and open the small door. The farmer took an automatic from the shelf and balanced it on the palm of one wide hand.

"You did good in the Argonne," he whispered to the gun. "You did real good in the Argonne."

His wife had taken the coarse woolen shawl from about her shoulders. She passed it to Novak and he wrapped it around the automatic. The farmer stepped to the door, opened it and glanced across the cobbled yard. He closed the door again and handed the bulky package to the silent woman.

*"Vite!"* he said.

She lifted her hand, pointing the muffled gun toward Novak's shoulder. He nodded and she fired. The farmer winced and staggered back against the table. A dark stain showed on the shoulder of his blouse and the acrid smell of burnt powder and wool drifted up to the men in the attic. Lieutenant Tindall drew a deep breath. Sergeant Davis gasped.

"Lor' lumme!" he whispered. "What's 'e up to?"

"A bullet hole makes a strong argument."

"Stout beggar, that one."

"He's a man."

Novak had hidden the gun in the closet. He tossed the shawl into the fireplace and motioned toward the iron kettle that was swung on a crane above the flames. His wife poured water into a yellow pottery bowl. She tore the blouse away from his shoulder and dabbed at the wound with a dripping cloth. The minutes limped past. The water in the yellow bowl grew dark. At length there was the sound of a motor in the yard.

AN OFFICER in gray stepped into the room. He was a slender man with narrow shoulders and a thin face, but his step was heavy as he crossed the earthern floor. Behind him came two privates, rifles at the ready. A third stood at the door.

"The flyers," said the officers. His French was bad. "Where are the flyers from the plane?"

"Gone," said Novak. "They're gone."

The German pushed the woman aside and pointed to the farmer's shoulder. "What is this?"

"They saw your car coming up the road," said Novak dully. "I tried to make them wait. They shot me."

*"Ach! Dummkopf!"* The air was foul with the reek of burning wool. The officer blew hard through his nose. These filthy French peasants! He beckoned to Novak and crossed to the door. "Which way?" he demanded. "Which way did they go?"

The farmer pointed with his uninjured arm toward the south. The officer laughed. Even his private laughed. Two of them, at a word from the officer, started over the hill at a loping trot. The other opened the car door for his superior and climbed in behind the wheel. Peter Novak watched the car wind down toward the river road.

"Come down and see what you can do with that plane," he said presently. "You got maybe twenty minutes."

Fifteen were enough. Fifteen minutes of frantic labor and the big motors turned, coughed, and settled down to a steady roar. Tindall set the throttle to let them warm and climbed down to the blackened field. Peter Novak stood just clear of the slipstream, one arm about the shoulders of his wife. The woman lifted her face. Novak kissed her on both cheeks. He pointed toward the plane.

*"Au 'voir, maman. Dieu vous garde!"* he said. And then to Tindall: "She'll be safer in London."

"But you're both coming along. Plenty of room."

"Aren't you forgetting my lights?"

"I'm not forgetting anything," said Tindall. "You've already done more for France than one of her own."

"I am one of her own."

Tindall's laugh was short. "Nonsense! You're an American!"

"You're wrong, soldier. Americans don't lose wars. They

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win or they die trying. As long as Peter Novak lives, he lives as a Frenchman."

A lesser man might not have understood. Lieutenant Tindall brought his right hand sharply to the rim of his flying helmet. A moment later the wide-winged Hampden rolled across the field and left a tumbling cloud of black dust in its wake. Peter Novak stood alone in the morning sun. He waved. . . .

•

ENGLAND fought on. Time and again the huge bomber droned across the night sky on its raids into enemy country. Always the three lights burned brightly just north of Moulins. Then there came a night when Sergeant Davis' voice rasped over the intercom.

"The lights, sir," he said. "I don't see the lights!"

"Neither do I," said Tindall dully.

He banked and put the nose of the Hampden down. A three-quarter moon spread silver over the rolling countryside. It touched the fire-scarred walls of a farmhouse and showed them in all their nakedness. The thatch roof was gone. The wooden table and reed-bottomed chairs that Peter Novak's hands had made—these too, were gone. Everything but the walls.

"You're off course, Lieutenant," said the navigator.

"Am I?" said Tindall.

One hand was steady on the control column. As the dark mass of a city's walls came into view the other hand reached down and pulled the bomb-selection lever.

"There's a gray building with wide stone steps, Davis," he said over the intercom.

"I see it, sir."

A moment later the big ship lurched as Davis let go the stick. Tindall circled low and came in on another run. There was flame in Moulins now. There were gray stones tumbling from the walls of a building with wide steps.

"We've evened the score for one Frenchman, sir," said the sergeant.

"You're wrong, Davis," said Tindall. "Peter Novak isn't French. Not now. He couldn't win so he died trying. That's an American's birthright."

# Meet the Author!

## Men Who Make the Argosy—Norbert Davis

*IF ANY of you had not previously made the acquaintance of Jim Daniels, you have your chance this week, simply by turning to a story called "Hang Him High." Daniels is a slight young man with a gift for words and for the law. His creator, Norbert Davis, is a large young man with similar gifts.*

*We have Mr. Davis' own word for it that he is large. Since it is virtually impossible to pry him loose from his beloved California, we have never had the pleasure of meeting this exceedingly successful author of ours. So we wrote him, demanding to know who he was. Shortly we received a self-study, captioned Norbert Davis: His Life and Works. We quote:*

"When you read one of these writer-biography sketches, you get the idea that the bird who is writing about himself is a pretty smart guy. Don't believe it. I know a hundred writers, and they are mostly dopes. But not me. Oh, no! I'm so full of brains I'm constantly out-smarting myself.

"Aside from that, I'm six feet five inches tall, weigh two hundred and fifteen pounds, have a face like a gargoyle and the disposition of a tired tarantula. I don't have any dislikes. I love everybody and everything, but most of all I love sports—spectator sports. I go for any game where I can sit down and watch the other guy work, and shout: 'Thatta boy,' or 'Well played, old chap,' from time to time.

"I served two terms in college—four years at the University of California and three years at Stanford, where Jim Daniels picked up his legal lore.

"My motto is: All editors are crazy, but I love them dearly—each and every one. (Ed. note: We have heard this before.)

"So long, folks. See you again soon."

In his modesty Mr. Davis has been all too brief, and the sketch requires some amplification. We've heard, for instance, that he first started to write when he was studying law at Stanford. Fiction was to be a sideline, for the serious side of the man was dedicated to the law. But the story habit got a firm and permanent grip on him, and so here he is today, busily turning out his fast and cleverly plotted novels. And plenty of us are glad that Mr. Davis could not shake off the urge to write.

The Works, which Mr. Davis says nothing whatever about, are numerous. At least two of them—"Gunsmoke Case for Mayor Cain" and "Sand in the Snow" (the latter published in ARGOSY—advt.)—have been bought by the movies. The pictures haven't yet been produced. Then there have been serials a-plenty, in ARGOSY and elsewhere; and Mr. Davis has several books to his credit. For a man who claims that he constantly out-smarts himself, he's done pretty well; there apparently is much to be said for a tired tarantula.

So long, Norbert Davis. Writers aren't sane, either.

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# LEGENDS of the LEGIONARIES

:ORIGINS·OF·THE·CUSTOMS·AND·SAYINGS·OF·THE·FIGHTING-MEN : by W·A·WINDAS :

## · FLAME THROWING TANKS ·

These engines of war are not so new as is generally supposed. A 15th. century painting shows a Persian 'tank', apparently propelled with hand-turned cranks (or with horses covered) throwing great masses of flame ahead of its advance. The flame was probably Greek Fire

## ·RANK INSIGNIA·

Insignia of rank has not always been customary in many armies. However, a 15th. century war manual suggests that it "might be wise for Captains to wear some token for the identification of their rank".

## The EAGLE · STANDARD ·

Many nations have used the eagle as a national emblem. This is to emulate the traditional emblem of Ancient Rome, whose success all others wished to imitate. Doubtless the handsomest and most distinctive of all is the U.S. Bald Eagle, with his snowy white head and tail.

## ·IDENTIFICATION of BLOOD ·

In the present war both British and German troops have symbols on their Identification Tags, which represent the kind of blood in the man's veins. This is to facilitate transfusions for the wounded.



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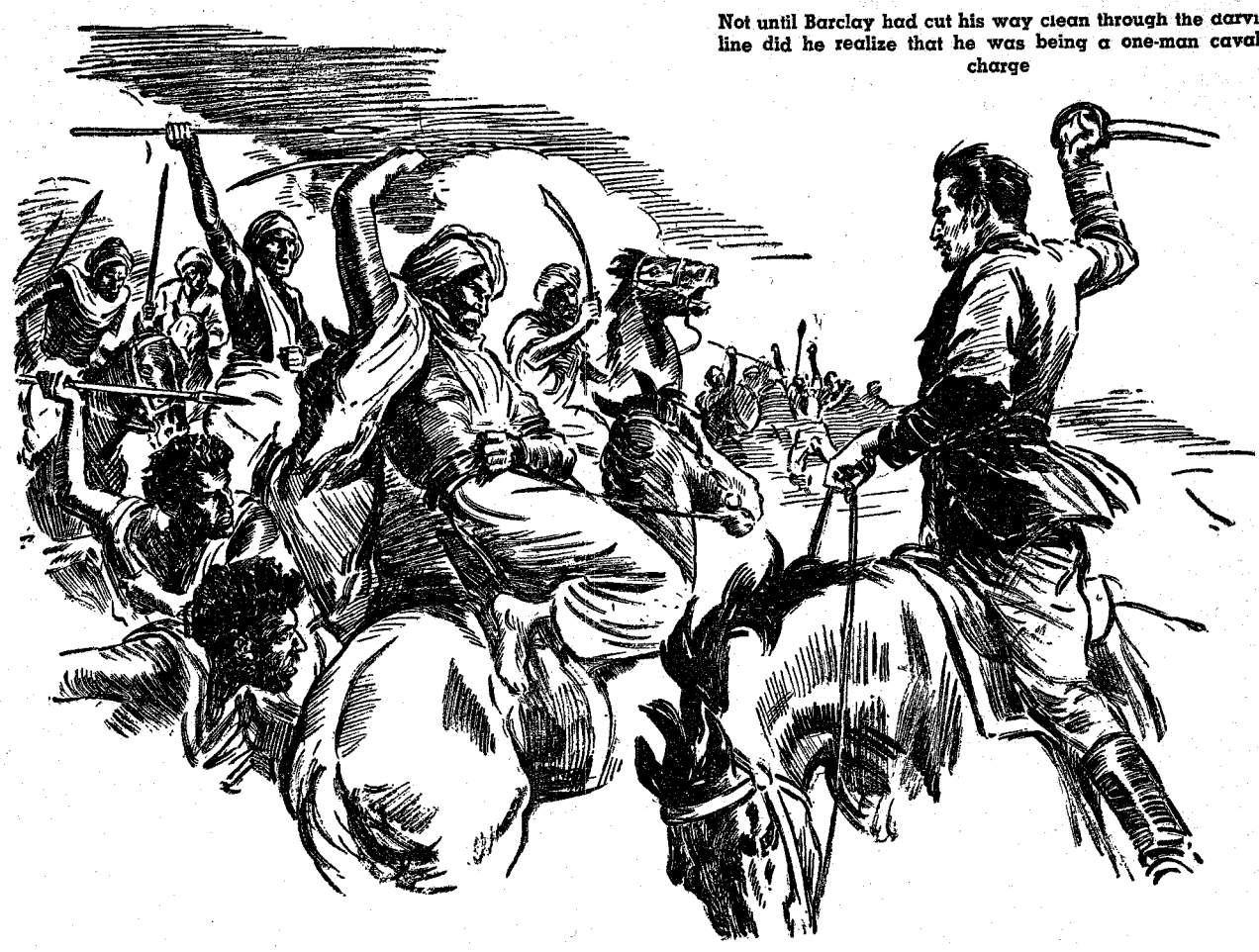

Not until Barclay had cut his way clean through the darvish line did he realize that he was being a one-man cavalry charge

# Drums of Khartoum

## By E. Hoffmann Price

EGYPT 1884. The rebellious MAHDI and his army sweep the Soudan; Egypt itself is threatened. Even now the Mahdi's forces are approaching Khartoum, at the juncture of the Blue and the White Niles; if Khartoum falls all Egypt will be within the rebel's reach. The corrupt and vacillating Khedive dallies; while the British officials strangle in their own red tape.

At last the government sends one man, "CHINESE" GORDON, to hold off the Mahdi and successfully evacuate the city. General Gordon's prestige among the native tribesmen, they believe, will be sufficient aid to the poorly trained Khartoum garrison.

To Khartoum also comes GILBERT BARCLAY, an ex-secret investigator, dismissed from the service because of his failure to apprehend ARMAND PICOT, a French agent who has been aiding the Mahdi with munitions and information. Picot has fled from Cairo and Barclay, spurred on by his failure, has determined personally to capture him and take him back to Cairo under arrest.

When Barclay arrives, Picot eludes him and leaves Khartoum to join the advancing Mahdi. Barclay's plan is to follow and arrest him—but before he can leave Khartoum the Mahdi's advance forces arrive to place the town under siege.

Part of Barclay's failure in the Picot affair had been due to his fear that IRENE MARLAND, an American girl who was infatuated with the Frenchman, would be involved. However, she has managed to convince Barclay that any aid she had given the Frenchman had been entirely innocent; and she has persuaded General Gordon to permit her to accompany him to Khartoum.

In spite of Barclay's entreaties she has refused to return to Cairo and she too is trapped by the siege.

THE SITUATION at Khartoum is desperate. Fort Omdurman is garrisoned by a small force of not particularly efficient soldiers. Gordon's proposal to enlist the aid of ZUBEIR PASHA has been rejected by SIR EVELYN BARING in Cairo because Zubeir is known to be a slave-trader.

Nor will Sir Evelyn send Gordon any of the British soldiers stationed at Suakim. Gordon is not to wage war against the Mahdi; he is merely to defend Khartoum until such time as an orderly evacuation can be made.

The disastrous announcement of these orders has turned the natives of the desert region between Khartoum and Cairo against the British and the Khedive. If they are to be abandoned to the Mahdi in any case, they may as well join him actively in an attempt to win his favor.

So Gordon can neither attack nor retreat; and there is little hope that he can hold Khartoum in the face of the Mahdi's daily growing forces.

Chafed by this enforced inactivity, Barclay proposes to Gordon that he be sent on a small expedition to purchase food and supplies outside the walls of the town.

He is certain to be attacked; and the attack will furnish Gordon with all the excuse he needs to send out

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the soldiers. This will serve no important military purpose, but it may help to convince ABU GIRGEN, leader of the Mahdi's advance troops, that the forces in Khartoum are not utterly helpless.

The ruse works; there is a fierce skirmish and Gordon's native soldiers are on the point of gaining a victory when two of their leaders order a retreat. Barclay is sickened at this open treachery, and he approves Gordon's summary death penalty for both. With enemies within and enemies without, a city is depending on one heroic man who can no longer trust even his own officers. . . .

## CHAPTER XIX

### TRAITOR'S REWARD

GORDON still hoped that by holding Khartoum against the increasing hordes that invested the city, he could force a stalemate; for a fanatic's army needs a victory. Nothing else will keep it together.

And thus, though Cairo would not send Zubeir Pasha, Gordon planned on a final success based on the Mahdi's army eventually falling apart of its own weight, of internal jealousies and dissensions: for he refused to admit that this flame that swept the Soudan was really a religious revolt.

"That scoundrel of a Mahdi is an impostor," he told Barclay, "an impostor denounced by a number of Moslem leaders. He's a figurehead supported by Ilyas, the great slave-trader of Obeyd."

Then he changed the subject with that swiftness which always left Barclay dazed. "Go down to the prison and witness the executions, I'm fearfully busy."

"Er . . . you mean, Ibrahim Pasha and—"

"Of course!" He thumbed the pages of his heavy Bible. "Nasty necessity, but I've simply got to have them shot."

"Is it necessary for me to see it, sir?"

"Certainly! As my representative." He fumbled in a drawer, and brought out a document in Arabic. "Deliver this to Shukri Bey, he is handling the details. Damn it, Barclay, I don't like these formations! It's my duty, signing this warrant, a duty I can't delegate, but my God—don't you see, going down to watch the sentence executed—it makes it too personal—as if they were traitors to *me*, when actually, they were betraying their men, their fellows, their city—"

"Very well, sir."

On his way to the prison courtyard, Barclay remembered how awe had gripped him on seeing the general's rage when the two traitors were brought into the office; and how Gordon had found time for reading the Bible while waiting for them to face him.

Barclay said to himself, "He makes it hard for himself. He reads, *Judge not lest ye be judged*. But he had to judge. He wanted to take the pair of them to pieces with his own hands, and it's that personal feeling that stirred up the scriptural bees in his bonnet. He's so eager to see them face a firing squad that as a good Christian, he can't let himself witness the ceremony."

Khartoum seemed entirely normal as he walked along. It worried about nothing. Soldiers off duty drank *merissa* and gambled with dominoes in the plaza. Even after that first battle, there was real-estate trading; and businessmen bickered with Zenoba, who owned shops and mills and a fleet of *nuggars* which still plied up and down the Nile. Zenoba was a speculator and money-lender, and she wrangled with her husband, Hajji Mahommed, for not making more out of his wood-turning shop.

Oh, Khartoum was carefree. Native girls sat in the bazaars, selling onions and eggs and cucumbers, flirting with dandies who paraded about. Everyone believed that a British army was on the way, and whoever had two *riyals* to spend for a pint of date brandy was happy.

That the powerful Shaykh el Obeyd had arrived, that Wlad en-Nejumi and Abu Anga and Ali Cherif had joined the besieging darvishes did not concern anyone but Gordon Pasha.

The guards at the gate of the prison courtyard saluted when they saw Gordon's red seal on Barclay's pass. The officer in charge had been waiting for him; a hundred soldiers, men who had taken part in the battle, stood under arms, at ease. And the traitors were already bound to the wall by shackles and chains which spread-eagled them against the masonry.

THE officer, Shukri Bey, flipped his cigarette aside, saluted briskly, and smiled. "You are representing General Gordon, sir?" He fingered his waxed moustaches, took the warrant, glanced at it. "Thank you, Barclay Pasha. Would you like to stand inside the square, or over there—"

He gestured to a bench near the side wall. Shukri Bey was a good-looking young fellow, brown and pleasant. His teatime manner made Barclay shiver and say, shortly, "This is quite bad enough, sir."

Shukri Bey offered him a cigarette. "My men are grateful to you for your presence of mind the other day, sir."

The officer bowed, drew his sabre, and gave a command in Turkish. The soldiers came to attention. Another command, and they formed a square. Barclay did not want to look at the two condemned men. From the corner of his eye, they were blurred, dark forms, stripped to the waist.

When Shukri Bey began droning the sentence, Barclay half turned, and lit his cigarette. He was not interested in the monotonous recital of the court-martial findings. And then a few words came to him with unpleasant clearness: ". . . to be chopped to death with halberds . . ."

He straightened up, sharply.

"See here, Shukri Bey! Is that what the warrant says?"

The *bey* ignored the interruption; sabre at the carry, warrant in his hand, he commanded, "Perform the sentence!"

Barclay gulped and felt sick. In spite of himself, he looked; he saw two black soldiers, stripped to the waist, march from one side of the square. Instead of halberds, they carried broad-bladed axes.

There was a *chunk*, a groan, a clank of chain. Barclay began to understand. One executioner could have fumbled his stroke, but both could not. He choked, and yelled, "Shukri Bey! You can't do that! You can't cut them to pieces—General Gordon—"

The soldiers were standing rigidly at attention. Barclay bounded forward, but the square stopped him; he did not try to break through it.

Shukri Bey turned, sabre still at the carry. "That is the ancient Turkish military law," he explained, "and it is just." He added in French, "Please control yourself, *monsieur*, this is the sentence for traitors."

Barclay counted the axe blows: he flinched with each one.

Finally it was finished and Shukri Bey gave a command, and the square became a line again. He handed Barclay the warrant and said, "Please tell Gordon Pasha that the sentence has been executed."

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"Do you mean to say—" Barclay gulped, "that the general ordered—*that?*"

"Possibly you did not read the warrant, sir."

In the failing light, Barclay scrutinized the formal flourishes of the *diwani* hand in which the sentence had been written. When he looked up, he said, "It does say that they were to be cut to pieces—but he must have signed it without reading!"

Shukri Bey bowed. "Who am I to know? Do you care to ask Gordon Pasha if he reads every order his clerks hand him, or if he understands enough Arabic to catch every detail?"

Out in the street again, Barclay wiped the sweat from his forehead. His shirt and trousers clung to him, and he trembled so that his legs could hardly carry him to the first Greek *loqanda* where he gulped a tumbler of cognac.

The proprietor asked, "How did the traitors die, Barclay Pasha?"

"Completely!" he snapped, flung down a coin, and turned to the street.

A NEW fear and a new understanding had come to Barclay. He knew, as surely as if he had asked Gordon and received an indignant denial, that the general had not ordered that two traitors be chopped asunder. English officers had, in the dreadful Bengal Mutiny of 1857, blown Sepoys from the mouths of cannon, but there had been only a few such atrocities, and those only in retaliation for worse outrages.

A firing squad was the humane general's limit; the warrant calling for the literal execution of the ancient Turkish law was sure proof that Chinese Gordon's knowledge of written Arabic was even less than his sketchy command of the spoken language; that Gordon's clerks and interpreters wrote what they pleased.

Barclay began to understand the rash proclamation at Berber, when it was announced that the Khedive was abandoning the Soudan. Either outright treason, or the stupidity of an officious *dragoman* had been responsible for that disastrous proclamation.

Barclay feared that Gordon's own troops, that the very people he had come to save, would in the end prove more dangerous than the army of the Mahdi. And he recollected that Shukri Bey had had the condemned men chained and ready for the axe, *before having read the warrant.* Gordon's clerks were governing Khartoum behind the general's back!

All night, Barclay sought to steel himself to telling Gordon: but in the morning, his courage failed.

The band was playing for the general while he took his coffee in a kiosk of the palace courtyard; and when he saw Barclay at the arched entrance, he beckoned and said, "Sit down! But don't make your report. God, how I loathe firing squads."

Gordon's eyes and face looked strained. He'd been searching the Scriptures all the past night, seeking precedents. No, Barclay could not have told him.

## CHAPTER XX

### ATTACK AT DAWN

IT WAS late, and mosquitoes swarmed, but Irene and Barclay still sat on the flat roof of the house she had rented. The moon was in its last quarter, and the only light came from the charcoal that glowed in the wrought-iron brazier near Irene's feet. When Barclay dropped several chunks of gum olibanum on the coals, resinous fumes rose in a fragrant cloud.

"Fat lot of good that does!" he grumbled. "I think they like it!"

"It helps a little," Irene said, and then to prove just how little, she exclaimed and bent forward in the canvas deck chair to slap her ankles.

"Here we're hemmed in by forty thousand darvishes, and we can fret about mosquitoes!"

Late in March, the Shaykh of Obeyd had made his camp north of the Blue Nile, not far from the spot where treachery had robbed Gordon of victory. And now, early in May, Abu Girgeh was preparing to cross the White Nile, a few miles south of Khartoum.

These armies lived off the country, and while they did not entirely prevent friendly local tribes from coming into the city with dhurra and cattle, they seized nearly the whole supply for themselves. And Abu Girgeh's crossing at Kalakla would blockade the land approach.

Barclay sat there, thinking of all that, until finally Irene exclaimed, "I don't believe you heard a word I said!"

"I was thinking," he answered, "that your father would love to see me speared. Getting you into a place that doesn't seem to be supplied with exits!"

"Don't be conceited, Gil, I got myself into this. Haven't I been wiring Dad every week, telling him how perfectly lovely it is in Khartoum, and about the native weddings, and the band concerts, and everything?"

Barclay chuckled, and stroked her hair. "You must think he's fool enough not to guess that you're wiring because it's hard to hire a courier to carry letters through the hostile desert. And I'm sure the papers in Cairo wouldn't publish any of Gordon's dispatches, telling about native women rioting in front of the palace, screeching for dhurra, and wanting him to shoot the speculators who've cornered the groceries."

She laughed. "From what you've told me about the general's telegrams, no paper in the world would print them. What was it that he said about Lord Granville, the other day?"

"Er . . . um . . . I don't exactly recollect—"

"My maid told me. Gordon's clerk told her. Gil, why don't those people listen to Gordon? Imagine, he sends eleven telegrams in one day, and that pigheaded Sir Evelyn asks him to express his wants in one clear expression? Good heavens, from all I can gather, the general is painfully clear."

BARCLAY answered, "You Americans don't understand our terrible British habit of muddling through. They've blocked Gordon at every turn, and just in case your maid has missed anything, I can tell how bad it is."

"Oh," she said, affectionately mocking, "you're very much his pet ever since that awful execution."

"I'm not Gordon's pet, no man alive is or ever should be. But he's lonesome, the most lonely man alive. He has forty thousand of us on his hands, white and black and tan, and sometimes, his brandy and his Bible aren't enough. So he talks, I think it's because he feels neither I nor anyone else will ever be able to quote him. Or, maybe, because he hopes someone may be able to."

"Gil—is it that bad?"

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"Yes and no. You and I, all the Greeks, the ten Jews, the consuls and their families, the Austrian tailor, we could get out when the Nile rises enough for a steamer to pass through the rapids. But Gordon can't."

"Why can't he?"

"Erratic, darling. In everything. In his extremes of language, and in his sense of honor. Don't you see, when he arrived and all the notables cheered him, accepted him as the representative of British power, believed that he'd have redcoats here to back him and Zubeir Pasha to set up a sultanate, every inhabitant in Khartoum was damned by that maniac of a Mahdi. Now look—no support, no backing, not a chance of evacuating this town and leaving order behind. So Gordon won't abandon these people."

"But he can't save them?"

"And being Gordon, he won't save himself."

They had blocked Gordon from the first week of his arrival; they had forbidden him to visit the Mahdi and attempt to effect a man-to-man compromise; London and Cairo had flatly prohibited a move which might have resulted in his becoming a prisoner. Unbearable loss of "face", a British general captive in the Mahdi's camp!

They had refused to send Zubeir Pasha, despite the daily telegrams which explained the necessity. Nor would even a hundred redcoats be sent, nor the several regiments of Indian Moslem troops, nor the 3000 Turkish soldiers he had requested; and even while Irene and Barclay sat on the roof, just across the street from the palace, Gordon was composing further telegrams.

He had no hope, but he persisted.

BARCLAY slipped his arm from about Irene's shoulder, and bent over the smudge-pot to look at his watch. He rose and caught her hand. "I've only a few minutes left, they'll be leaving presently."

"They?" She stood so close to him that he could distinguish the pucker of her brow. "Who?"

Then she heard the tramp of feet, and unmistakable sounds of men under arms; mutterings, instead of full throated commands. There was a hissing of steam from the *Ismailia,* which was moored only a few hundred yards from the river face of the palace.

Barclay drew her closer and breathed in her ear, "Don't tell anyone, darling, but we're preparing Abu Girgeh's breakfast. We've checked and cross-checked all the spies —I think we have as many outside Khartoum as they have in town—and we're quite sure Abu is crossing at dawn."

"But what have you to do with all that?"

"I'm going."

"You idiot, why? Has he put you in command?"

"Of course not! I'm no soldier, and badly as an amateur can bungle by day, what he'll do at night is ten times as fatal. I'm just going along."

"Stay here, Gil! You're not under any obligation."

"I hadn't intended going," he answered. "But talking about Gordon and his resolution to stay in town, regardless, somehow made up my mind. Those men are going up the Nile to smash Abu Girgeh, to crack darvish prestige, to give the friendly tribesmen a chance to bring food into town, and to give them a little more reason to remain friendly."

"But what'll *you* do? Suppose you do kill a darvish or two? Will that—"

"That wouldn't!" He twisted free of her grasp. "But I can't let black men go out to fight for your food and mine, and not go with them." He chuckled. "Don't worry, sweetheart, I won't get in their way, I'll be on the boat, where I can't hinder anyone!"

"You haven't even kissed me!"

"If I did, I'd probably change my mind about going."

But Barclay did not board the *Ismailia*. He hurried to his quarters, where his negro servant waited with a horse. The beast stamped and pawed impatiently in the early morning chill. Barclay said, "Muffle that curb chain, and muffle his hoofs! Hurry."

He put on the oversized uniform he had borrowed and pulled on his boots. He buckled his pistol-belt on the run, thrust the servant aside, and vaulted to the saddle.

"Your spurs, *effendi!*"

"Shaytan take the spurs!"

"Allah go with you, *effendi!*"

As he rode toward barracks, Barclay drew the cavalry sabre, found it free in its scabbard, and then sheathed it again. He had fenced a little in his time, and played a reasonable amount of polo, but he wasn't sure that his first *moulinet* would not clip the horse's ears instead of splitting a darvish skullcap.

He remembered his pistol lanyard, and slipped it over his shoulder; no use taking any chances of dropping it when it was needed.

The troops were formed in the courtyard of barracks. Shukri Bey, sabre at the carry, nodded and said, "Good morning, Barclay Pasha! I was about to send an orderly after you."

"I don't look much like a Pasha! Is there anyone General Gordon hasn't decorated?"

The amiable *bey* chuckled, and it was hard to believe that he had insisted on hacking two traitors to pieces. "His Excellency has overlooked me, but by sunrise—"

"I'll give you my *pachalik* if he doesn't! When do we move out?"

"At command of headquarters. The general has been observing the current all night. The *Ismailia* must steam just so fast, to be neither behind us nor ahead. And without too much noise, the sound of steam might give warning."

GORDON, once colonel of engineers, missed no detail; and in China, he had won many of his battles through the skillful use of armored river boats.

This knowledge gave Barclay much comfort when, a few minutes later, the column filed southward. With even a small trickle of supplies coming through, and a fleet of Nile steamers to shell the enemy when they came within range, Gordon could hold Khartoum until the stubborn cabinet ministers woke up and sent him help.

The sentries at Bab el Mesallamia did not challenge. The column was a black snake winding through rank grass, and over the low knolls beyond the trenches. Every few minutes, Shukri Bey reined in his horse, and took from his pocket a vial of olive oil in which phosphorus had been dissolved. By this faint glow, he could just see the hands of his watch.

Ahead, far enough to be barely perceptible, a platoon marched as an advance point. The mounted bugler at Shukri's right rear made a monotonous, muted droning, humming a bazaar ballad; the sound blended with the buzz of night insects.

Shukri whispered to Barclay, "The men are in high spirits, and anxious to make up for their undeserved

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failure. They'd be singing and shouting now, if I hadn't promised to shoot the first man who made a sound."

Presently, Barclay could catch the metallic gray gleam of the Nile, and the dark bulk of the opposite bank. He was not sure that he could distinguish the *Ismailia*. There was no glow from her funnel, nor any hiss of steam audible above the night sounds.

Darvish drums had begun to mutter beyond the thousand-yard width of the great river; a furtive thumping, though it must have seemed loud enough in the camp of Abu Girgeh.

Shukri Bey halted his troops, and sent his orderly ahead to halt the advance point. He dismounted; the infantry squatted in the mosquito-swarming grass. False dawn was brightening the sky, and until darkness fell again, he could take no chances.

"I think I hear the *Ismailia,*" Barclay finally whispered.

"She'll be running as close to the near bank as possible," Shukri answered. "So you'll not see her."

Then the column moved forward. The drumming became clearer, and though there was no shouting, Abu Girgeh's eight thousand men and the animals and the camp followers made a muttering that carried over to the advancing troops.

A man came running and reported to Shukri, "Some of the enemy have crossed—hundreds of boats—thousands of men."

The column halted.

Runners went to the rear with Shukri's orders. In the thick gloom, Barclay heard the stirring and the tramping as platoons and companies moved out, alternately right and left, in a line of supporting squares.

There was a pearly ghost-gleam in the east. Barclay sighed and slapped mosquitoes. And then his horse tightened up under him, and would have whinnied but for a hand catching his nostrils.

"Smells darvishes," Shukri said, a new note in his voice; it was no longer languid and amiable. "Orderly!"

*"Aywah, effendi!"* The bugler pulled up beside the *bey.*

Then there were yells ahead, and rifle shots. Drums roared. A rocket serpentined from the river, and steam hissed. The *Ismailia's* position was clear enough now, and her paddles churned. The show was on.

## CHAPTER XXI

### GENERALS MAY SAY FAREWELL

THE bugle rang high and clear above the yells of the black soldiers and the crackle of musketry. Far ahead, spurts of flame marked the position of the darvishes, and bullets began lacing the air. The shifting wind thickened from drifting powdersmoke.

In the dawn mists, Barclay could see no more than vague dark masses as he booted his horse to keep up with Shukri. The *bey's* staff and orderlies were on his heels; the whole line was pivoting, very slowly, on its right flank, so that the left would envelop the darvishes at the river crossing.

Another bugle: *Commence firing!*

The mists thinned. Rocket-troughs were set up, and fiery streaks roared toward the howling tangle on the east bank of the Nile. Camels bolted, horses screamed and stampeded when the horizontally flying rockets swept across the field, and burst shoulder-high.

The *Ismailia* was plain now, smoke pouring from her stack, musketry crackling from her decks, and twelve-pounders crashing from behind their sandbag barricades. As she steamed against the current, her gunners shelled the darvish camp on the further bank of the Nile. The frail little "penny" ferry wove and bobbed and heeled under the recoil of her guns; her paddle wheel churned the river white.

Barclay had lost Shukri in the confusion.

On one side, platoons had halted, front rank kneeling, rear rank standing: they fired by volleys, pouring lead into the milling rabble on the near bank. Other companies, whether by order or moved by enthusiasm, charged with bayonets, shooting wildly as they ran.

Barclay felt horribly conspicuous, on horse, towering above the black soldiers. He seemed to be the only target in all that smoky stretch of flat land, and worse than that, he was alone.

He leaned forward in the saddle and drew his pistol. His horse bolted for the space between two platoons. Before he knew what had happened, Barclay had company a-plenty; not that of the black soldiers, but of the darvishes.

Lead from both sides whisked past him, knocked his cap off, tugged at his flopping blue tunic.

Halfway between the opposing forces, he knew why his horse had bolted. Whistling slugs had made him crouch jockey-like in the saddle, and that would make the sorriest nag break into a run. Now it was too late to slow down.

Keep moving, move faster.

The darvishes, though raked by bullets, though cut off from their supports, were rallying. Their emirs galloped about, sword in hand, checking panic-stricken spearmen and riflemen. A clump of fanatics charged out with lances; others, on foot, came running, firing, yelling *"Fi shan Allah!"*

Barclay booted his horse. A one-man cavalry charge!

He laughed wildly. This, after telling Irene he was going to be a spectator. He swerved, avoiding a head-on meeting with half a dozen darvishes, and hosed them with his pistol as he passed them on his right. Just a flash, a saddle emptied, and a second. His gun was empty, and he whisked out his sabre.

He did not hear the howling behind him, and he did not notice that the black soldiers had ceased firing; he had no ear for the clear, high scream of bugles in the rear.

He was pelting through a nightmare of darvishes, of riderless horses, of bolting camels. Someone thrust up with a lance, and he slashed out, splintering the shaft, and driving home with his sabre.

Somehow, he parried the cut of a two-handed sword, and found that his horse's ears presented no problem at all: they were laid well back, and the beast was racing, belly to the ground.

He hurdled a heap of dhurra, a dead camel, and he was through, southbound and heading for the tall grass.

WHEN he wheeled, he saw that there was no use hurrying to rejoin Shukri Bey's troops. They had the darvishes enveloped, except for stragglers. The big black men had swept the field, and now they danced about, shooting and bayonetting the wounded, looting the luggage, laughing and howling.

Shukri Bey and his staff rode in, striking with the

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flat of their swords, beating the victors into some semblance of order.

Bugles bawled, and all the while, the *Ismailia's* guns kicked up great clouds of dust west of the Nile.

Abu Girgeh's boats were sunk, hundreds of darvishes had drowned in crossing; those on the east bank were blotted out nearly to the last man, and those on the further side begged Allah for longer legs and faster horses.

Presently, the gunnery ceased.

A messenger galloped to Khartoum to give Chinese Gordon the news: Abu Girgeh beaten, at a cost of only forty men.

It was well done.

As he rode back with the victors, Barclay said to Shukri, "I should like to congratulate you, sir, but I feel that that is General Gordon's privilege. I wouldn't be surprised if he made you a *pasha,* within the hour."

Shukri stroked his mustache. "He probably will, and he could do a lot worse," the *bey* admitted. "Though it would help a great deal if he did not know that your ride for the darvish position brought the Fifth Company to its feet, and then all those devils went crazy and charged, the whole line, every last man of them."

"Huh! Horse got out of control. I'm sure I'd not want General Gordon to know I couldn't keep this nag in hand!"

Aside from half a dozen painful slashes, and a lance thrust that did not go far enough to be serious, Barclay was uninjured. He felt light-headed, he wanted to chatter every inch of the way back, and to resist that reaction, he froze and said not a further word until Gordon came galloping out of the Kalakla Gate to meet Shukri Bey.

Then he said, "I'll drop back a bit, this is your affair."

•

That night, there were fireworks in Khartoum. The Greeks had a record sale of date brandy and *merissa.* And the soldiers of Khartoum reeled up and down the quai, where they shouted insults at the Shaykh of Obeyd's scouts on the further bank of the Blue Nile.

Khartoum was happy, except for the grain and meat speculators, who lost heavily from the influx of supplies; and a few of the notables wore unconvincing smiles, for many of them were secretly communicating with the Mahdi, particularly the sour-faced Shaykh ul Islam, and the *qadi.* And Chinese Gordon ceased smiling as soon as the last rocket was fired.

He said to Barclay and Colonel Stewart, "This did buck up our prestige a little, but they'll soon be wondering where the redcoats are. Each time we make a sortie, we'll lose a few men, and my task is not to conquer the Soudan but to bring these soldiers to Egypt. Gentlemen, I am still trying to get those bloody oafs in Cairo to send a relief force, since they refuse to send Zubeir Pasha. In the meanwhile, we'd better start planting *dhurra* on Tuti Island."

"*Dhurra,* sir?" Barclay exclaimed. "Why, it couldn't possibly ripen before this coming February, it's barely ripe enough in December or January to be of much use."

Gordon smiled bitterly. "I am well aware of that, Barclay Pasha, but we may be damn glad to eat things even partially fit for consumption by then, if we actually take any interest in our diet." He turned abruptly, to his desk, opened his Bible. "Good evening, gentlemen. Forgive me for spoiling your pleasure in this splendid day's work."

THE following two weeks proved how nearly right Gordon's pessimism had been. Far down the Nile, the Bisharin and Jaalin Arabs had revolted, and had captured Berber; partly by open assault, partly by inside treachery.

The inhabitants, brooding over that fatal proclamation whereby the Khedive announced his relinquishment of the Soudan, had made no more than a half-hearted defense; they had been all too ready to cry, *"Fi shan Allah!"* and prove their loyalty to the Mahdi, so that when he conquered Egypt, seized Mekka, slew all the infidels in the world, and began his thousand-year reign of glory, they would be among his favored followers.

Berber now belonged to the Mahdi. He controlled the inland end of the route that reached to Suakim, on the Red Sea. Steamers could still go down the Nile, and run the blockade, but evacuating the city of Khartoum was impossible as it never before had been.

And when Barclay saw Irene that night, he knew better than to cook up a cheerful story. She had developed a nice knack of telling, quite accurately, when he was lying. She said, "You're such a poor liar, Gil, please don't bother this time. I know all about it."

"About what?"

"General Gordon's farewell telegram, a few days before Berber fell."

"Oh, my God! That maid of yours, and that clerk!"

She nodded. "Somehow, it really helps. I'd much rather know what we are facing. Festivals, decorations for newly appointed *pashas,* fireworks, band concerts, tall yarns about redcoats being on the way, that's fine for the natives, the general has to keep them cheered up. But you and I can bear the truth."

She quoted it, Gordon's message almost word for word: Gordon had told the government that while he had made mistakes, he had done his best, and that since they had abandoned him, he was staying with his people, the natives for whose lives he had made himself responsible. From now on, there could be no communication with the outside except by couriers and spies who could slip through the enemy lines far to the north.

Barclay nodded. "That's right. But Gordon believes that finally there will be a relief expedition, not for his personal rescue, but for the whole town. So he's preparing for more than just defense. The munitions plant is working overtime, Mr. Power is in charge of the powder-making, and the reloading of expended Remington cartridges. They're putting more armor on the steamers. All that'll take time, but don't worry."

"I'm not worrying. Not about anything, except your crazy persistence about one thing—waiting for the Mahdi to pitch his camp on the Nile, so that you can arrest Picot." She caught his shoulders. "Gil, if you'll promise you'll give up that crackbrained idea, I'll marry you tomorrow. I'll go back with you on the next boat to Cairo."

For a long moment, Barclay had an armful of temptation, but he finally said, "No, dear. You forgave me for playing soldier, and you'll forgive me for playing constable. And don't keep on telling me that my purely accidental cavalry charge should wipe the slate clean, in Cairo. It can't, it won't, and it shouldn't."

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## CHAPTER XXII

### VICTORY TOO EASY

CHINESE GORDON thumped his brandy tumbler on the desk, and took the cigar from his mouth. "Barclay," he said, "I categorically forbid you to make any attempt to overtake Shukri Pasha's expedition. I am tired of your damned nonsense! I forbade you to join the troops at Gereif, and you went. And then—"

"Sir, who's been discrediting me? I got along nicely with Shukri Pasha, as far as I could see."

"Sit down." Gordon gestured. "He said as much. But I want you to stay here today. For reasons of my own."

Barclay had begun to catch the point; Irene had been talking, and Gordon had listened. "Very well, sir. It was just a matter of having someone of our race going with Shukri Pasha and his blacks."

Gordon laughed. "You're quite too tactful to say that you think Miss Marland has persuaded me, eh? Well, now. You told me, months ago, that you were out to catch that scoundrel of a Picot—and how can you do that if you're shot in action?"

"The men and officers—"

"That's their duty. Yours is to arrest that—that—*cabinet officer!*" Gordon had finally unreeled his supreme expression of contempt in referring to Picot. "So you will stay with me, I'll—damn and blast it all, I'll make you an honorary aide!"

Gordon, himself despising decorations, dispensed them lavishly to others. Barclay could only say, "At your service, sir," as he rose to follow Gordon to the roof of the palace.

It was September now, and it had been a hungry summer. The Albanians had eaten a month's ration issue in two weeks, and had to be provisioned again, across the river at Fort Omdurman. Someone had taken a million pounds of biscuit and *dhurra* from the government warehouse; Gordon suspected that it had been sold to the enemy.

Officers were selling the soldiers' rations to speculators; the only ones who refrained from thieving were the chicken-hearted *fellahin* soldiers, and this one virtue kept them from winning Gordon's full contempt.

For some moments, Barclay stood scowling behind the general. He was thinking, "Damn it, if she keeps on trying to force me to hide behind her skirts, I'll open her eyes! You'd think I'd attempted suicide at Gereif, and at Halfaya."

Gordon, driven by the need for supplies, had sent Shukri Pasha out two weeks before and in a battle on the bank of the Blue Nile, south of Khartoum, Abdel Kader's newly arrived force had been scattered. Then came a foray into the region where Abu Girgeh's army had been wiped out at dawn: and there was a second victory; the enemy lost sixteen hundred rifles and many side arms.

Finally, Shukri had moved north, and ten miles down the Nile, had routed the Shaykh of Obeyd. Now Shukri was a general, and proud of himself, for Khartoum was eating heartily once more.

The markets were full of corn, and cattle, butter and vegetables; the speculators had once more been caught short. And Shukri was steaming up the Nile with nearly two thousand men, to renew the attack on the Shaykh of Obeyd and the Emir Medawi, near El Eilafun.

THEY were twenty miles up the Blue Nile, and far further than Gordon could see, even with a telescope on the height of the palace roof: but there he was, pacing, pacing, pacing. Barclay watched him light one cigarette after another. Every once in a while, the general stepped to the eyepiece, squinted into it, then cursed bitterly.

"Damn Shukri! If I could only be sure he won't get too far from his boats," Gordon exclaimed, and fumbled in his scarlet tunic for a cigar. "Barclay, get my brandy—no, never mind!" And he resumed pacing.

It was about mid-afternoon that Barclay saw the dust cloud, far up the Blue Nile. He noted the tightening of Gordon's jaw, and waited for the explosion; none came.

Half a dozen riders galloped down the river bank. Barclay groaned, "Good God! Some of Shukri Pasha's men."

Gordon said, "It's good news! Can't you tell from how they ride? Man, where are your eyes?" He turned and darted toward the stairs. Barclay followed him, thinking, "That mystic feeling again, hope he's right!"

Gordon barely reached the quai when he shouted to the pilot of the *Bordein,* "Steam over to meet them, quick, man!"

Barclay and the general boarded the ferry, and she made way for a spot upstream where the riders would pass.

The *Bordein* ran her nose into the bank, and the paddles slowed down until their drive was just enough to keep her in place. They got the story. One of the riders slid from the saddle and leaned against his sweating horse; he gasped, "Sir, General Shukri presents his respects and reports to General Gordon Pasha that the Shaykh of Obeyd and the Emir Medawi are running for the bush as fast as they can—" He coughed, readjusted his broad grin, and straightened up, forgetting his stilted military speech. "By God, we cut up a thousand of the pigs, we are going to chase them until they drop, we'll bring the *shaykh's* head back."

Barclay translated; the man's breathlessness made the mongrel Arabic unintelligible to anyone whose command of the tongue was as sketchy as Gordon's. Then he gave the general's answer: "Come aboard, and get fresh horses, and ride back to give your general the thanks of Gordon Pasha!"

As the *Bordein's* engines reversed, to put about and return to Khartoum, Gordon said to Barclay, "I don't like that. The *shaykh* is running too readily, and in spite of the Emir Medawi's reinforcements. I've got to send Stewart with reinforcements. But you'll have to go too, you'll have to ride faster than you did during your one-man cavalry charge. It'll take far too long for Stewart and Bakhit Bey to get there with their men."

Barclay grinned, then said, very solemnly, "You mean, sir, that I'm to be the stopgap?"

"You'll be more than that! Shukri's young and hot-headed, but he likes you, and he'll hardly disobey a direct order from me. He'd never listen to an ordinary courier, or regard a written message. So pick a good horse, get fresh ones for these couriers, and you'll need a handful of men in case you run into the *shaykh's* scouts. Tell Shukri under no circumstances to advance into the brush until he's reinforced."

"Very well, sir."

The general smiled, and there was a momentary touch of his old humor. "You're almost as cowed as a married

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man. But don't be afraid, I'll tell Miss Marland that I ordered you on this mission."

HALF an hour later, Barclay was out of Khartoum, and spurring his horse up the east bank of the Blue Nile. The courier and the ten black soldiers followed him, and before the ferry could reverse her paddle, the cavalcade was galloping through the brush, and over the knolls that lay beyond the swamps which skirted the river.

It was four o'clock. He had a little over three hours of daylight, with no dusk to speak of. He asked the orderly, shouting above the drumming hoofs, "Was Shukri Pasha starting out to chase them when you left?"

"*Wellah, effendi,* I do not know, I heard talk of digging trenches along the river, and Farajallah Bey was to guard the boat, and then Shukri Pasha told me, say such and such to the general, oh thou ape, and do not lose time! So I rode and spoke."

There were stretches where the trail led through dense thickets of tamarisk and acacia, and through mimosa whose inch-long spines pierced Barclay's boots. Even at this short distance from the confluence of the two rivers, the Blue Nile country was showing how it differed from that beyond the White Nile. Hillocks were more frequent, and steeper; there were great patches of grass which grew eight and ten feet high. Its blades slashed Barclay's face and hands.

He was glad when the short-cut rejoined the road. A brisk gallop brought the party to the ruins of Soba, the crumbling and half-buried capital of the ancient Christian kingdom of Alva.

"Not much further, *effendi,* maybe as long as three cigarettes," the guide told him.

Barclay was thinking, "If Shukri chases the *shaykh* into the bush, he's crazy!" But he also had to admit that African troops had an instinctive knack of worming their way through the savage thorn-barriers.

Seven miles below Soba, the three steamers were moored along a stretch of clear country. The ground was almost flat, and from the river, a v-shaped grassy stretch reached four or five miles inland. Beyond that were low hills, tawny in the setting sun.

Several hundred blacks, stripped to the waist, were digging trenches and rifle pits for look-out posts; some hewed scrubby acacia, and others sharpened the gnarled trunks, and many were busy lashing the stakes together to make an *abbatis* to protect the position from surprise. At a glance, Barclay saw all this preparation, and recognized Farajullah Bey, who rode about supervising the work.

Barclay came to the point at once, saying to the *bey,* "General Gordon sends me with an answer to Shukri Pasha's message. Where is he?"

Farajullah was tall and on the black side, and not too smart looking. "Knowledge is with Allah! He marched after the Shaykh of Obeyd, and who knows where the *shaykh* will go in leaving El Eilafun?"

The thick-lipped *bey* was calm, patient, and polite. He had been put to work fortifying the base camp, and he was doing a good job of it; what Shukri Pasha was doing in the bush was Shukri Pasha's business. Allah did as He saw fit, and whatever happened was good.

Barclay gritted his teeth. "Which way did the *shaykh's* men run?"

The *bey* pointed toward the apex of the vee, and said, "Manifestly, that way, since he could go further in less time. So Shukri Pasha took sixteen hundred and twenty-two—no, twenty-three men to pursue, and left me here. Doubtless, the enemy is bound for Omm Dubban, though Allah is the Knower."

"How many men have you here?"

"Four hundred and twelve, God be praised."

"Take three companies and hurry after Shukri Pasha, General Gordon wants him reinforced at once."

Farajullah Bey mulled this over, and finally said, "The peace upon you, but I am responsible for these boats, this camp. I was ordered to entrench and guard against surprise."

Without a *firman* signed and sealed by Gordon, he was not quitting his post. Barclay made a final attempt:

"Colonel Stewart and Bakhit Bey are coming up the river with a thousand men to land here, and then to hurry after Shukri Pasha with reinforcements. Don't you understand—he can get into the devil's own mess, plunging through to Omm Dubban, and at night?"

"I understand, sir. He is my superior, and a brave man, but Allah is calling him to His mercy! Because Shukri Pasha is to be ambushed on the way to Omm Dubban, am I to go after him and lose my men also? If I am lawfully ordered, then I go, but without General Gordon's *firman,* I stay, and the peace upon you!"

Barclay looked at the long red bars of light that reached from across the Nile, and the long black shadows of the steamer smokestacks, and thought for a moment of the bush that lay beyond the ruddy eastern hills. Then he said, "Give me what guides you can, and a dozen men. Maybe I can overtake Shukri Pasha and bring him back."

"That I can do, and Allah prosper you, and him also!"

The *bey* deliberately picked men, and sent for rations and fresh horses.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### STAND ON YOUR FUR

HALF an hour of daylight remained. Once the African night swooped down, the bush could offer anything; and particularly, parties of the Shaykh of Obeyd's men. Disciplined troops are at the worst in country such as lay over the hills that Barclay approached, and guerillas were at their best.

There was still a bare possibility that Shukri Pasha's troops were not yet doomed, and Barclay could hardly blame him for having taken the insane chance. The grim old Shaykh of Obeyd had suffered two defeats, and in the second, his brother had fallen in action; this encounter would decide the fate of the central Soudan.

If Shukri won the reckless gamble, if the *shaykh's* men were battered to pieces at Omm Dubban, Khartoum was saved, Gordon would have the whole Nile in his two hands, and Muhammad Ahmed, the Mahdi of Allah would stay in the west. Years ago, Gordon had taken a Chinese rabble and made it into a force that won and deserved its title, *Ever Victorious Army.* And, as in this present case, he had fought against religious fanatics; like the Mahdi, and his men, the Tai-Pings of China had been self-styled messiahs, overthrowers of oppression, harbingers of a New Paradise on earth. Like the Mahdi, they had slain and looted and tortured and burned.

Gordon had settled the Tai Pings. This thought cheered

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Barclay as, during the brief dusk, he reached the apex of the cleared vee, and faced the deadly trail to Omm Dubban.

The riders let their winded horses breathe a little, before plunging into darkness and long thorns.

The guide was a lean man whose hooked Arab nose and deep-set eyes clashed with his black African face and scraggly Negro beard; but Barclay had quickly lost that momentary impression of dismaying incongruity. By now the man no longer impressed him as an unpredictable mongrel. He sensed that Musa combined negro loyalty with Arab cunning, a certain shrewd coolness won in the skirmishes whose marks scarred his ugly face.

Barclay gestured ahead. "Even as Musa the son of Firaun's daughter led the Yahudi through the wilderness, do thou lead us, O Musa!"

The old man like that Arabic play on words, the quip that linked him with Moses, who was so often mentioned in the Holy Koran. He said, *"Aywah, sahib!"* And some of the men whispered, *"Wellah,* the *Inglesi pasha* has read that which is to be read."

What followed was Hell without benefit of fire: a darkness full of spines and spikes. Horses stumbled over rocks, and shied at birds that rose with drumming wings. Later, there was a desperate scramble down the steep wall of a *wadi.* Barclay's mount snorted, tried to back away; but the earth crumbled, and man and horse crashed to the rocky bottom.

Barclay kicked clear, and battered himself in doing so. But he was on his feet before his men crowded around to help him. "I'm all right, how is the horse?" he demanded, hoping that they did not notice the tremor that pain put in his voice.

"Well, praise Allah!"

From then on, he ceased noticing the mimosa thorns, for staying in the saddle was putting a savage strain on wrenched tendons. He was not quite sure whether the moisture that made his shirt cling to his bruised body was sweat or blood, and he would not stop to find out.

Finally he demanded, "Did Shukri Pasha march troops through here?"

"Not just this way," Musa answered. "But this is shorter."

That answer gave Barclay new worries. He looked up at the stars, tried to orient himself, and found no comfort. They were going north sometimes, at others, south, and occasionally, east.

The only thing certain was that the trail never led west.

THERE was no African chatter; just the *clop-clop* of dragging hooves, the creak of leather, the muted jingle of steel, and an occasional grunt as a horse stumbled.

Slowly, the stars swung. There were hourly halts, as nearly as he could guess; these were for the horses. This was no time for sparing men.

It must have been well after four in the morning when Barclay began to feel that he would live to see the sun rise. Some of the weariness left him, and a little of his anxiety. The bush was still bad, but it was thinning, just as Musa had predicted. The old man said, over his shoulder, "By dawn we reach Omm Dubban, *inshallah.*"

Omm Dubban: "The Mother of Flies." An unsavory name, and Barclay wondered at a town that should be so called in a land where every village swarms with the pests, big, little, black, blue-green.

He shivered in the chilly freeze, and then he straightened up. "Musa! I smell horses!"

More than that, there was the foul odor of battle, the yapping of jackals tearing what the vultures had abandoned with darkness. The smell was not yet strong, but Barclay had by now been in enough African skirmishes to recognize it.

They pressed on faster.

Half an hour later, a sentry challenged and at the same time blazed away with his rifle. Another shouted, "Turn out the guard!" and began firing into the bush until his gun jammed.

Barclay yelled, "Patrol! Friends!"

He found the *pasha* sitting in a tent. Shukri's uniform was as ragged as Barclay's, his face and hands were as badly slashed; and his *tarboosh* was cocked crazily over a bandage. As he rose, in the dim lantern light, he swayed on his feet.

Then he steadied himself and extended his hand. "I hope you're not bringing reinforcements." Shukri forced a jaunty grin. "You'd be wasting them."

"Gordon sent me to recall you. He went wild when he heard you might chase the *shaykh* into the bush."

Shukri laughed. "I knew he would. But we'd have gotten him if there'd been another hour of daylight. Even so, we cut up his rear guard."

Dawn was breaking, and Shukri blew out the lantern. Already, Barclay could see the men sprawled on the ground, sleeping wherever they had dropped from fatigue.

"Get them out of here!" Barclay repeated.

Shukri started, awakening from the sleep into which he had been relapsing. He said to his muttering orderly, "Sound reveille!" And to the servant who sat up, rubbing his eyes: "Get my horse!"

The bugle brayed. The weary and the wounded aroused and groaned. Shukri drew a deep breath, squared his shoulders, and paced about the camp as he waited. He took a *dhurra* cake from the stack one of the soldiers had laid out, and broke it in half, offering Barclay a piece. The man grinned, seeing two *pashas* eating enlisted man's rations.

When Shukri mounted up, brush fires crackled here and there in the morning grayness.

"For God's sake, have them eat on the march!"

Shukri answered, "There'd be a panic. They'd eat while pursuing, but not while retreating. What's the matter, Barclay?"

"You're in a bad position. Gordon sees beyond other men. He ordered me to ride all night to recall you, and he's sending a thousand more men up the river."

"I'd rather press on. Just another hour yesterday evening, and I'd have had the *shaykh* cut to pieces. Surely, Gordon Pasha sees far, but he did not see those dogs run, nor these men chase them."

And then the choice was taken away from the hard fighting *pasha.* There was no rumble of drums, no warning thunder of hooves: just a volley that seemed to come from all side at once. A soldier squatting a yard away toppled over, and coughed blood on the *dhurra* cake he still held. Shukri flinched, clutched his left arm, then shouted to the bugler, "Call to arms!"

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SOLDIERS scrambled for their rifles and began blazing away wildly. The outposts were holding; had they given away, the attack would already be charging the camp. Barclay's mounted men galloped after him as he followed Shukri.

There was disorder, but the moment of panic was over. The men who had dropped about their commander's tent had been winged by wild shots. Barclay judged from the sounds that three large parties of darvishes had slipped up, and were now converging on the camp in crescent formation.

The companies were forming as best they could in that thorn-clustered ground. And now the outposts were falling back, firing as they retreated toward the main body.

Darvishes on horse, darvishes on camel, darvishes on foot cleared the brow of a low crest a quarter of a mile ahead. For an instant they were silhouetted against the rising sun, but that did not help the *pasha's* blacks; they had the glare in their eyes, and their own retreating outposts masked their fire.

But the negroes advanced in a tight line of skirmishers, with a column guarding either flank. They halted, and as the outpost detachments darted through the intervals and reformed on line, they opened fire, lacing the brush with bullets.

The darvish charge fell back, and Shukri's bugler sounded the advance.

Barclay rode with the *pasha*. He knew before they had gone a quarter of a mile that these men were doomed. With the thinning of the bush, and the strengthening of the light, he could see the encircling clouds of dust, the banners that made red blots against it. And the drums were booming; great kettle drums, and little saddle drums.

Shukri made an arc with his sabre, and shouted in Barclay's ear, "Gordon Pasha was right, I disobeyed and this is my day! We cannot go back, so we go ahead."

"You could try a retreat through the brush!"

"Not after this mistake!"

THE bugles screamed again, and the skirmish interval was taken up. They were forming a square, now that the ground was clear enough. Barclay galloped ahead, and risked the fire that crackled about him when he reached a knoll. The fugitive *shaykh* had more men than seemed possible, after two defeats. Over on the left, where the Emir Medawi's standard loomed up, the ground was alive with men. They were slipping through the bush, enveloping Shukri's entire force.

Barclay wheeled, rode down the right, and overtook the *pasha*.

"You've still got a chance to retreat! You're so outnumbered you'll have to! Gordon ordered you to withdraw."

Shukri halted in a clear spot. He dismounted, unsaddled his horse, and spread the blanket on the ground. He picked up a darvish lance dropped in yesterday's feigned flight. Then he took off his tunic with the new epaulettes and the gold braid of a general, put the garment on the butt of the shaft, and then jammed the leaf-shaped blade deep into the ground.

"I am disobeying Gordon for the last time." He stepped to the sheepskin saddle pad. "I am standing on my fur. Tell Gordon Pasha, and he will understand."

By now the halted square had every rifle ablaze, and the darvish wave returned the fire. They were dismounted, darting from bush to bush, pouring lead from every quarter. They had seen Shukri's red tunic, and knew what that meant. For lack of a personal standard to set up while he "stood on his fur," the *pasha* had made himself a flag.

So they would not risk a charge against those waiting blacks. Not for a while, not until the ammunition was exhausted.

Barclay's men had gathered behind him. He could feel their eyes boring into his back. He tried to repeat Gordon's orders, and he knew the futility.

Shukri said, "You were sent to me, and you found me, your duty is done, now ride back with news of me. On this day I win the 'fuller knowledge'. This is my day of fate, and it is not yours. Now go! What is this to you, did you disobey Gordon as I did?"

Barclay could not answer. If he did not leave quickly, he would not be able to leave at all. No reinforcements could possibly arrive in time to make any gain out of this suicidal stand. And suddenly, he knew that he should leave this man; the thought flashed through his mind, "If I stay, I can't get Picot. I have to do that, as he has to do this."

He extended his hand to the man whose deliberate cruelty had once made him shudder. Shukri ignored it, caught him by both shoulders, kissed him over each eye. "Allah go with you! And take my horse, he is yours. For the sake of the first battle you and I won."

"Uh . . . thanks, old man. Good luck."

Barclay raised his hand in salute. Then he mounted up, and his men followed him. He hoped that the square would break soon, for once Shukri and his standard fell, the surviving soldiers would take to their heels, and some would reach the Nile.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### CAMP OF THE MAHDI

BARCLAY stood in his room, stripped to the buff, and decided that the walnut-bronze stain that darkened him from head to foot would help him when he crossed the river to arrest Armand Picot. Then he turned to the heap of grimy garments stripped from a darvish shot down in one of the sorties from the south wall, and picked up the baggy pantaloons.

He put them on and tied the drawstring. He reached for the knee-length shirt of *dammur* cloth.

There was only one bloodstain, and that was hardly noticeable against the black of the patch which was crudely stitched to the front. He put on the belt of braided straw, and then he wrapped the turban cloth about the little red skullcap. Around his neck he hung a rosary of wooden beads, and finally, he slipped on the rawhide sandals. Aside from his sword, dagger, and spear, he was completely decked out.

Oddly, he was very calm about it all. He yawned, exhaled a deep breath, and went to the dresser to get his pistol. This he thrust into the pouch at his belt, along with the Mahdist prayer book, the *ratib* which all darvishes had to memorize. Then Barclay opened the door a bare hand's-breath and said, "All right, darling, come in and have a look."

Irene shuddered, closed the door behind her, and stood

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for a moment, looking at him. "Disgustingly natural!"

He grinned. "I steamed all the vermin out of it, you might risk kissing me."

"Gil, darling—" She clung to him, pressed her face against his shoulder, then looked up, smiling, and blinking a little. "I promised I wouldn't argue or make a fuss, and I'm not, really, am I?"

"Good girl. With the shortage of foodstuffs in town, it's high time to go over to eat some of the Mahdi's rations. Say hello to your father when you write, and tell him to give his answer to the relief expedition."

He edged her toward the door. Watching that brave attempt at a smile did not help. "Run along dear, and we won't miss the next boat!"

He drew back, softly closed the door, but he heard the rustle of her skirts, and her choked cry. She said, *"Standing on your fur!"*

A moment passed, and there was a tapping. "May I come in?" a familiar voice asked.

"Perfectly timed, sir," Barclay answered, and admitted Chinese Gordon.

Barclay reached for the ankle-length cloak he had worn in his march across the desert. It hid the conspicuous four patches of his darvish *jubba*. When he had the cloak gathered about him, he went with Gordon down the cavernous passageway that led to the side street.

WITHOUT a word, they walked through town. There was no more mirth and music. All that had died, two months previous, the day when Shukri Pasha "stood on his fur" at Omm Dubban. The Shaykh of Obeyd's victory, destroying more than most of the reckless *pasha's* forces, had made the Mahdi hurry toward the Nile, to strike before the long hoped for relief force could come up the river.

As Barclay and Gordon approached the southern line, the guns of Fort Mukran opened fire. There were red bursts across the river, where the Emir Ali Sherif had camped. A steamer moved out from behind Tuti Island, and joined the firing.

The soldiers posted along the four-mile front rushed to the parapet, and rockets *whoooshed* into the enemy's camp, a mile south. Neither the garrison of Khartoum nor the besiegers would notice the two men who walked in darkness down to the Nile.

A dugout was beached in a cleft cut by the last rain. Gordon helped Barclay slide it to the water.

"Bring the scoundrel back! I'll have him shot as a spy, and make an official entry in my diary. Much better than taking him to Cairo."

"Have to catch the rabbit first, sir."

And Barclay shoved off, assured of not running afoul of any small boats carrying spies to Khartoum. The threat of a steamer flotilla would have driven them to cover.

He still wore his dark cloak, and he took off his turban cloth. The sharpest eyes could not detect him, for the moon had not yet risen.

The broad Nile spread out like a lake. The bombardment had ceased, and the uproar in the darvish camp subsided. Barclay had gotten his bearings before the enemy guns had stopped firing; their flashes had spotted the place where he expected to land, where he would land if he made proper allowance for the current.

After Shukri Pasha's suicidal stand at Omm Dubban, Irene had resigned herself to Barclay's resolution. She made only a half-hearted attempt to point out that for a disobedient officer to "stand on his fur" was not necessarily a precedent for a member of the constabulary; she had anticipated his answer, "My dear, a soldier fights an open enemy. A constable goes after hidden enemies of the same people. If I hadn't see Shukri that morning, I might possibly change my mind."

So Irene replied, brightly, "I'll say no more, and of course, you won't try to bundle me on the boat. Fair, isn't it? In my own way, I have about the same obligations you and Shukri had."

That was the bargain, and she had lived up to it.

IT TOOK him an hour to cross the broad Nile. He landed in darkness and silence. After some minutes of poking along the bank, he found that he had landed within fifty yards of the spot he had picked with Gordon's telescope.

There was a deep undercut, exposed by the falling of the river, and once he located that, it did not take him long to find the small cave formed by the swirling high water. Into this he dragged his pirogue. With luck, he would return to use it.

When he climbed up to the level of the plain, he crouched, sniffing the air. He could smell the darvish camps in two directions. They were filthier than Khartoum had ever dreamed of being, and if Gordon could just hold on, it should not take a relief expedition to save the town. Smallpox or typhus could settle the Mahdi's force.

This small hope had to a degree taken the place of food for the past few months. A pestilence would be construed as a direct sign of Allah's wrath, and the Mahdi would lose influence.

Guided by the stars, he set out over the barren clay and rock of the west bank. The Mahdi's camp was now four miles from Fort Omdurman. Spies claimed that three hundred thousand fighting men had concentrated, but native observers rarely got the figures straight.

Barclay, however, criticized them just as a matter of form. A mere sixty thousand were quite enough to give him a fair chance of prowling about without running into Shaykh Mansur.

"I'll bet a hat," he said to himself as he plodded along over the broken ground, "that the old devil's first remark would be to the effect that Allah is with the patient."

He still did not know how the cunning old saint fitted into the pattern of fanaticism. A man who stepped into a desert village and within half an hour had the population kissing his hand and demanding his blessing could be very handy to the Mahdi! And in the last analysis, the most broad-minded Moslem saint could turn against an infidel.

FOR two hours, Barclay tramped along, using the shaft of his spear as a staff. The new moon now gave a faint, treacherous light. And he could smell the ammonia reek of picket lines, the odor of donkeys and camels, the lingering scent of dung fires. But there was no smell of *merissa;* the Mahdi flogged drunkards, and usually to death. Smoking was likewise prohibited.

Ahead, he began to distinguish a vast blurred blot, an unbroken darkness against the light and shadow of the Soudan. Presently, outlying *tukuls* loomed up like

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beehives against the sky. Barclay stopped, circling about until he found a hollow whose rim was fringed with tamarisk. He sat down, his spear across his knees, and waited for the camp to awaken.

When the sun rose, and the two hundred forty first day of the siege of Khartoum began, Barclay left his cover and entered the awakening camp. It reached as far as he could see, and for all that it included women, children, camp followers, and thousands of cattle; for all that such a sprawl of straw huts and tents did not shelter a tenth of the number of fighting men that an European army would put into a comparable space, its immensity shocked him.

Darvishes crawled out of their shelters and hurried toward the center of the camp. A mighty drum shook the air; El Mansura, "The Victorious", sounded the summons to prayer, and Barclay joined the fanatics. In that confusion of men, one stranger could not be conspicuous, or so he had told himself. But now he was not too sure. A man without comrades at arms might excite comment in sociable Africa.

The place of prayer was a quarter of a mile long, and over three hundred yards wide. Already, it swarmed with armed men. At the far end was a canopy made of spears which supported embroidered black cloth. This was the *mihrab* where the Mahdi led his people in prayer. And in the center of the rectangular space was a pulpit.

Donkeys brayed, camels grunted, goats bleated; the voices of thousands of men swelled to a rumble that made a background of sound for the booming of El Mansura. Then came a blast that tore at Barclay's ears, and made him tremble; *ombayas,* carved out of elephant tusks, were sounding off, and the trumpets' roar was like the fury of prehistoric monsters. There was triumph and there was wrath in that hoarse bellowing which announced the approach of Muhammad Ahmad, the Mahdi of Allah.

Already, men attended by armed guards had gathered about the *mihrab;* these were the khalifas, whose three great standards fluttered high above the smaller flags of the emirs. And all these dignitaries knelt when a man in spotless turban and *jubba* came riding up, surrounded by horsemen and trumpeters and drummers.

The Mahdi! The man who had set Africa on fire; a large man, tall and bulky, but stately in his carriage. More than this, Barclay could not see, for though he was as far front as he could get, the rising sun dazzled him, and he could not see any detail of those who halted, or of the man who stepped to the low platform under the canopy.

The *ombayas* ceased their mighty brawling, and there was silence.

THE Mahdi raised his arms. The kneeling thousands rose, leaving their weapons on the ground; then the prayer began and for the first time, Barclay heard the sonorous voice of the Mahdi.

But what stirred him most was the rumble that followed each phrase, when the uncounted darvishes chanted the lines after their leader, and knelt, heads touching the ground, and rose again. It seemed to Barclay that all Islam was genuflecting and reciting.

Finally the prayer ended.

The Mahdi stepped from the *mihrab,* and came down the narrow aisle that led to the pulpit. His face was pale brown, his beard was black and curly, and his cheeks were scarred from the three slash marks of his tribe.

Barclay, kneeling so near that he could smell the saint's heavy perfume of sandalwood blended with musk and attar of roses, caught the gleam of the large, black eyes; they mirrored the smile which displayed fine, white teeth. And those teeth had gone far to start Muhammad Ahmad on his mission: the two central uppers were separated by a vee shaped gap, *el falja,* known through all the Soudan as one of the tokens of saintliness and good omen.

An attendant followed, carrying a straight sword whose blade was nearly four feet long. Its cross hilt was of gold, and gold inlay gleamed from the mighty length of steel. Before the Mahdi ascended the pulpit, he took and raised the weapon. This was the tradition of Islam: the conquering lord, preaching with sword in hand.

"O True Believers!" His voice must have reached the limit of the rectangle. "Khartoum is before you. Allah has given us the city. He has given us the spoil, He has given us the lives of the infidel. The Angel Israfael, the dark lord of death, came last night to me in a vision, and I saw the shadow of his black wings reach over the city, and a great voice said, Muhammad Ahmad, take the city by the two waters, and then march into the land of Egypt, and into Holy Mekka!

"*Ya Mumenin,* you stand before the waters, and there is the City! Take, for the glory of God and His prophet!"

When the Mahdi came down from the pulpit, and rejoined his escort, Barclay went with the rush that would have enveloped the saint had not guards armed with staves beaten them back. He was carried by the close pressed pack, and its surging moved him like a chip spun by a whirlpool.

It was chance rather than design that brought him close to Armand Picot; so near that if his arms had not been wedged, he could have raised his spear and impaled the Frenchman.

*To Be Continued Next Week*


# Many Never Suspect Cause of Backaches

## This Old Treatment Often Brings Happy Relief

**Many sufferers relieve nagging backache quickly, once they discover that the real cause of their trouble may be tired kidneys.**

**The kidneys are Nature's chief way of taking the excess acids and waste out of the blood. They help most people pass about 3 pints a day.**

**When disorder of kidney function permits poisonous matter to remain in your blood, it may cause nagging backache, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.**

**Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. They give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from your blood. Get Doan's Pills.** (ADV.)


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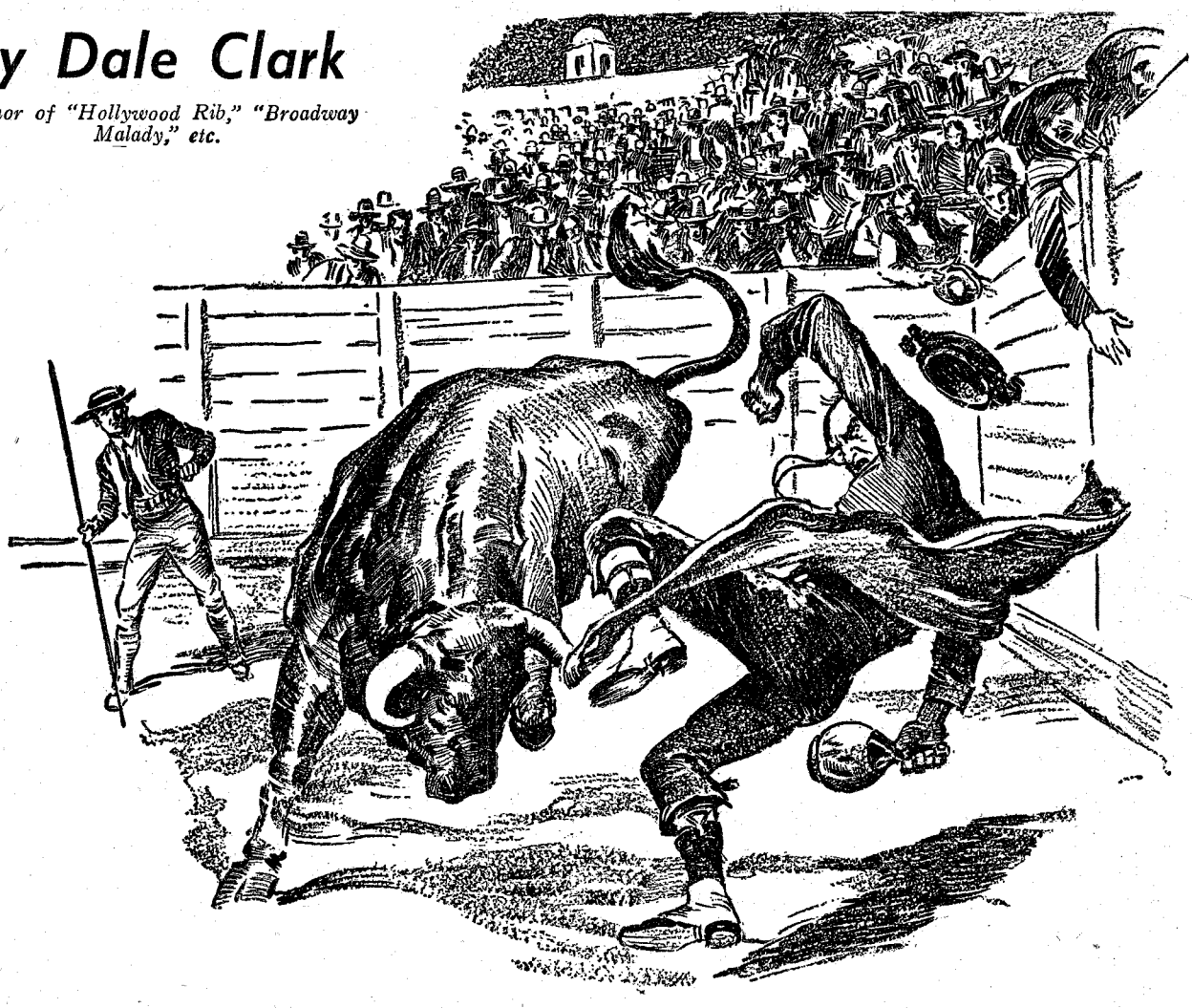
By Dale Clark

*Author of "Hollywood Rib," "Broadway Malady," etc.*



What with the bull and the serape and the tequila, Mr. Bell was having a very busy time

# Ten Percent Toreador

**In this corner, *senors*, you see *el toro*, the beast that battles with a bottle; and in the other corner, J. Edwin Bell of Hollywood, champion option-thrower of all the Americas**

HOLLYWOOD frequently wondered how J. Edwin Bell did it. "Look at the guy!" they'd say, wonderingly; and Mr. Bell was really worth looking at twice. Tallish, silver-haired, and slightly stooped, he nevertheless surrounded his lank angles with the latest in Bond Street tailoring. He went in for patent leather footgear, too, and for fawn-colored spats, two-toned haberdashery, and an ever-present monocle.

J. Edwin Bell sported his monocle in the fond hope of resembling at least a British earl. He didn't. Thanks to his scrawny, out-thrust neck and sharply beaked features, what he really resembled was a bird of prey: a bird walking around inside a British earl's wardrobe.

Now such costumes do not grow on the palm trees in Southern California. The sharpshooters along Hollywood Boulevard knew this, as they gave J. Edwin the glacial, arithmetic eye; and from what they added up on their cuffs, Mr. Bell's personal appearance must have set him back ten smackers per square foot of his visibility.

"Which," they remarked in Hollywood, "can't be."

Mr. Bell could afford his glad rags, nobody doubted that. Mr. Bell was a flesh peddler, or talent agent, and legally entitled to collect ten percent every time he landed somebody a job in pictures. And that counted only his legal take; what Mr. Bell made on the side—on the dark and devious side—was anybody's guess.

Yet—and here came the wonderment—this same J. Edwin Bell could by no means be called a free and easy spender. On the contrary, he tended to be extremely thrifty in financial matters. He was so thrifty that people in Hollywood had been heard describing him as the tightest thing since Anna Held's corset. They said he wore the ink off dollar bills by carrying them around so long.

In fact, Mr. Bell was the kind of a guy who would place IOU's instead of pennies on his dead grandmother's eyes.

Such being the case, how could the flesh peddler force himself to lay cash on the line in large, extravagant hunks when he came to buying clothes?

Hollywood wondered, but the answer wasn't in Hollywood. The answer lay a hundred and fifty miles southward—in Tijuana.





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A HUNDRED and fifty miles southward, then, J. Edwin Bell unfolded his lank length out of a passenger bus into the dusty *avenida* which is Tijuana's main street.

Hollywood Boulevard wouldn't have recognized Mr. Bell at this moment. His knees bagged, for one thing; and so did his elbows. His suit was of ancient vintage, of salt-and-pepper hue; it looked as if it had been contributed by the Salvation Army, which had gotten it from the Bowery branch.

Moreover, Mr. Bell was wearing a beard. His beard tended to the same salt-and-pepper shade as the suit, and extended from ear to ear; it was the kind of a beard you see in Civil War movies. And as a matter of fact, J. Edwin Bell had borrowed it out of a studio make-up department. The beard was a highly important part of his international, or going-to-Mexico costume.

It wasn't, however, any part of his regular going-out-of Mexico appearance.

The Tijuana scenery—besides the bearded J. Edwin Bell—consisted mostly of false-fronted frame buildings, whose windows were full of fly-specked Spanish signs advertising a *fiesta;* and whose doorways were full of sombreroed gentlemen enjoying the noonday *siesta.* The gentlemen's wives leaned out of thatched curbside booths, inviting the *turistas* to buy souvenirs of Baja California; and the rest of the families, in the numerous forms of coffee-hued urchins, assaulted the bus passengers with offers of *cigarritos* at a nickel a pack.

These Mexican *cigarritos* are very fine—for handing out to people who are always trying to bum smokes from you. J. Edwin Bell knew all about those cigarettes; so he didn't waste any nickels on the juvenile bombardment. He walked rapidly up the *avenida,* ducked into an alley, and entered a small, dark shop.

A sign over the doorway said: *S. Martinez, Imports.* There were more signs on the inside, explaining that Tijuana was in a free zone, that the prices charged by S. Martinez were strictly duty-free. But—according to a much smaller sign—you couldn't take more than five dollars' worth of these products through the United States Customs at the border; not unless you wanted to pay an import tax on them.

The proprietor, smaller and darker than his shop, advanced: *"Buenas noches, señor."*

For in Mexico, the land of *mañana,* people practically always say hello by saying good night—when they don't say it with *adios.*

J. Edwin Bell shrugged aside the greeting. "You godt mein package, nicht?" he demanded, affecting a thickly Teutonic accent.

*"Si, señor."*

S. Martinez produced the package; it was a largish one, from overseas.

"One thousand pesos," said he.

"Call idt a hundred bucks?" cajoled Mr. Bell.

Involved financial computations ensued; S. Martinez had to divide the pesos by the dollars, and the answer he got wasn't the current rate of exchange. J. Edwin Bell multiplied the dollars by the current rate of exchange, and didn't get the right number of pesos; they finished up by splitting the difference.

Mr. Bell walked out of there with the package clutched under his arm, and—

*"Con permiso, señor,"* murmured the girl in the adjoining cantina doorway. "You're an Americano, huh?"

J. Edwin peered suspiciously at the girl. She was of the Spanish, or moonlight serenade type of femininity: Latin, lovely, and luscious. She wore her brunette hair piled high under a silver comb; she had the drooping black lashes of a Castilian coquette; and the gauzy silk mantilla around her shapely shoulders failed to conceal a decolleté bodice.

MR. BELL was not impressed. He had seen this girl before—or anyway, he had seen thousands just like her. He had seen them hanging around Hollywood casting offices, mostly, when they weren't herding hotdogs in drive-ins for a living. Mr. Bell, who was just as romantic as a cash register, figured there were only two kinds of dames in the world: the kind who had movie contracts, and the rest who hadn't.

From the flesh peddler's professional, or ten percent point of view, the second kind of dame didn't count even slightly.

This brunette *señorita,* as he sized her up, was probably just a cheap cantina castanet-clicker who got paid off in pesos and peanuts, and so certainly wasn't worth any of *his* time.

"I'm an American, yeah," he growled. "So what?"

The *señorita's* white teeth flashed appealingly. "Then I theenk maybe you read heem for me?" So saying, she drew a folded slip of yellow flimsy from the folds of her black mantilla.

"Ees a telegram," she explained.

Mr. Bell could see it was a telegram. Moreover, he had heard about these Tijuana dames and their telegrams before. The telegram was always about a sick mother they had to go see right away; but they never had the money to go with. What they did have was a rare old heirloom of a diamond ring—and would the kind *señor* lend them fifty bucks on the diamond?

J. Edwin Bell's false beard concealed a wise-guy grin. "Why don't you read it yourself? You ain't blind, are you?"

She shook her brunette head. "Ees English telegram," she sighed. "I talk heem fine; but to read, no!"

Mr. Bell's skinny fingers accepted the oblong of yellow paper. But, boy, was this dame going to fall hard when she found out—

"Great slithering snakes!" the flesh broker exclaimed.

Because this wasn't any phoney wire about a sick mother. On the contrary, the telegram bore a Hollywood dateline over its message:

SENOR MIGUEL MORALES
MUSICAL MATADOR PROGRAM
RADIO STATION XCO
TIJUANA, MEXICO

HEARD YOUR BROADCAST STOP WOULD YOU CONSIDER SINGING ROLE IN COMING FEATURE PRODUCTION CHILLY FOR CHILE STOP REPLY COLLECT AT OUR EXPENSE

GUS LENNOX
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER
MOGUL FILMS, INC.

J. EDWIN BELL inhaled a large, startled breath. *Chilly for Chile* didn't happen to be anything except the most colossal musical production on the Mogul Films schedule. It was star-spangled, name-banded, and about to be directed by an Academy Award winner. It was the Monroe Doctrine set to swing music, and aimed squarely at the Latin-American box office—which must be why Gus Lennox wanted to hire a genuine Latin-American in the cast.

Quivering sound formed in the flesh broker's scrawny throat. "Where—where did you get this? You ain't Miguel Morales, are you?"

The brunette shook her head. "Ees my bruzzer."

"Your brother. And he sings on the radio?"

*"Si, señor."*

"And he can't read English, neither?"

Again the *señorita* shook her head.

Mr. Bell thought rapidly—and round-aboutly. Mr. Bell's thoughts were generally roundabout ones: his ideas went

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around and around, and finally came out of somebody else's pocketbook.

In fact, J. Edwin Bell was Hollywood's one-man fifth column.

Only, of course, he didn't do his fifth-columning for the benefit of any foreign power. Mr. Bell worked strictly for his own profit; and he wasn't giving away any valuable information, such as the fact that this dame's brother could collect at least five hundred a week for putting his voice on the soundtrack of *Chilly for Chile*.

"It's nothing," he gestured, letting the telegram flimsy drift down the breeze as if by accident. "Just one of them two-bit birthday messages."

"Birthday?" the girl puzzled. "But eet ees not Miguel's birthday!"

But J. Edwin Bell was already fading out of the scene and around the corner into the main *avenida*. "Don't blame it on me, sister," he said in retreat. "I didn't send him the wire, did I?"

Wind-wafted, the telegram drifted along the *avenida* among the thatched souvenir booths. Mr. Bell followed, swooped, and then fled.

Traveling in high gear past the Foreign Club, the flesh broker presently entered a small and ancient hotel. His room had been reserved in advance, and Mr. Bell went straight up to it. He locked the door, yanked down the window shade, and sprinted to the wash basin.

Two minutes later the flesh peddler's beard was hung on a bed post to dry.

Moving purposefully, J. Edwin removed articles from his salt-and-pepper suit: Wallet, papers, pen, a razor blade, needle and thread, and a monocle on a black silk cord. After which he opened his package and thereby revealed a complete and luxurious imported wardrobe. Mr. Bell used the razor blade to remove the tell-tale foreign labels from this merchandise, used the needle and thread to sew in some Los Angeles tailoring labels instead; and, as a finishing touch, employed his pen to write in a few dry-cleaner and laundry marks.

For J. Edwin Bell had figured out an efficient way to frustrate the Customs guards. Very simple, too. He just wore some old, worthless clothes across the Border; and a different outfit when he recrossed it. Mr. Bell could get away with it because nobody needed a permit of any sort to visit Tijuana; there was no reason why the officials should associate him with a certain badly dressed, bearded passenger.

BUT Mr. Bell wasn't thinking about the Customs officials just now. Emerging out onto the *avenida* the flesh peddler was again his usual self: smooth-shaven, sharp-featured, and monocled. His imported patent leather footgear twinkled brightly out of the Tijuana dust, tailored-to-measure fabrics adhered jauntily to his lank angles, and a brand-new derby slanted athwart his narrow skull.

J. Edwin caught self-satisfying reflections of himself in the windows he passed, and complacent thoughts formed in his narrow cranium. The Mexican gal would never know him as the same person who'd read the telegram for her; there wasn't a chance.

He hardly knew himself, in fact.

He strode confidently into the little cantina. "Gimme a drink of the best in the house," he said to the barkeep. "Give the *señorita* a drink, too. In fact, set 'em up for everybody in the joint."

This sounded more generous than it actually was. For there was nobody in the joint except J. Edwin Bell, the *señorita*, and a young guy who looked enough like the *señorita* to be her brother. Moreover, this young guy wore a loud pair of tight red pants, suggesting that he was probably a café entertainer by profession.

They lined up at the bar.

"*Salud y pesetas!*" said he of the red pants, politely lifting his glass toward the newcomer.

"*Salud,*" smiled the brunette beauty, with no spark of recognition in the glance she bestowed upon the flesh peddler.

"Here's mud in your eyes, folks," chuckled J. Edwin Bell, and sloshed a large swallow of fluid against his tonsils.

Immediately after which, Mr. Bell uttered sounds like a college yell leader, only louder and more painful.

"Wow! *Zowie!* Blloie-bowwow!" he commented, among other remarks, such as, "Great greased griddles of Gehenna!"

"Ees tequila," smiled the *señorita*. "Ees one very fine dreek, huh?"

J. Edwin Bell didn't think so; he thought it was something which belonged inside of an incendiary bomb; but he was too busy blinking tears from behind his monocle to say so.

The young guy in the red pants gestured: "Like thees, *amigo!*"

He showed the flesh broker how to drink tequila. It was two-fisted drinking; he threw the tequila in with one hand, and then whipped half a lemon to his mouth before he had time to taste the tequila. After which he licked a sprinkle of salt off the back of his hand, probably so as to work up a thirst for the next round.

Thoughtfully enough, the bartender was already setting the next round at their elbows.

"*Salud y pesetas,*" intoned the young guy.

But the brunette *señorita* dropped her shapely fingers firmly onto her companion's sleeve. "No, Miguel. Remember the *fiesta*."

J. Edwin opened his monocled eye in pretended surprise. "Miguel! Sa-ay, you ain't Miguel Morales, are you?"

Red Pants admitted it. "*Si, amigo.*"

THIS was J. Edwin Bell's cue—and Mr. Bell swung a mean cue when it came to getting a victim behind the eight-ball. He had often heard the Musical Matador program over XCO, Mr. Bell declared. And what he couldn't figure out was why a guy with a voice like Miguel Morales' should be broadcasting between corn-cure and falling-hair commercials on a Mexican wave-length—"when a smart agent could land you a job on a big network up in the States, or maybe even make a movie picture star of you.

"Like for instance," invented J. Edwin Bell, "just the other day a big producer was telling me personally he needed a voice like yours in his very next production. Anyways, it can't cost you a dime because I don't collect any commission until I get you a job."

Never slow on the buildup, Mr. Bell had already whipped a legal-looking document from among his personal papers. It was one of his regular, ten-percent agency contracts; and his ironclad contracts were famous in Hollywood. They were so ironclad, Hollywood said, that one of them could be used to patch up the side of a torpedoed battleship.

"All you gotta do is sign on the dotted line," said he.

Impaled on the barbed end of Mr. Bell's hypnotic stare, Miguel Morales closed his fingers around the flesh peddler's proffered pen and—

And the *señorita* stepped between the two, dropping her slim, sun-tanned hand on top of the dotted line. "Miguel," she declared, "you cannot do thees theeng!"

Mr. Bell glared. "He—huh? Why not? The guy knows how to write his own name, don't he?"

The girl shrugged mantilla-draped shoulders. "Ees the trouble," said she darkly. "He has already write hees name."

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The Hollywood flesh broker refrigerated with swift, inward dismay. The way she said that sounded just like—just like—

"Leaping catfish!" he shouted. "You mean somebody else has already signed him up on a exclusive contract?"

The *señorita* nodded. "*Si, señor!* You see, Miguel ees not the Mexican citizen! He was born in Texas, and he has not got the work-permit every foreigner must have in Mexico. Juan Hermosillo know thees secret, so he has what you say, make the blackmail. He has sign' up Miguel —for feefty percent."

Hearing which, Mr. Bell left the cantina in considerable haste. Traveling rapidly, he dived across the outdoor market to hail a Tijuana cop: "*Buenas dias,* flatfoot, and can you tell me where Juan Hermosillo has got his office at?"

JUAN HERMOSILLO had his office at 17 Calle de la Something-unpronounceable; and Juan Hermosillo turned out to be a small, round, shiny Latin-American entirely surrounded by cigar smoke, perfumery, and photography. The cigar smoke emanated from his Mexican *cigarrito;* the perfume wafted from his glossy, damp ringlets; and the photography hung on his office walls. The pictures depicted Mexican radio station talent, Tijuana floor show artistes, and bull-ring personages.

For Señor Hermosillo operated as a theatrical entrepreneur, or manager of entertainment; a guy who specialized in subletting rhumba dancers, singers, and castanet clickers.

Or in other words, Señor Hermosillo was a Mexican edition of J. Edwin Bell.

"*Salud y pesetas?*" he suggested, reaching one hand toward a sliced half of lemon and the other toward a large, gloomy bottle.

Mr. Bell shuddered. "Never mind; you just go ahead and salute yourself. My arm's still kinda lame from the last saluting I done—and anyways, I come here to talk business."

Because J. Edwin had got himself an idea.

He explained, although not truthfully. To be brief—which Mr. Bell wasn't—he claimed to be representing a cough medicine company that wanted to hire time over XCO; wherefore Mr. Bell was interested in lining up some talent for the cough medicine company. "Especially singers," he stated, "which could say they cured their sore throats by using this medicine. Especially a singer named Miguel Morales, or the Musical Matador, I guess he calls himself."

The eye of Juan Hermosillo sharpened itself. "You wish to hire this Musical Matador, so?"

Mr. Bell took a deep breath and denied it. "Not exactly hire the guy. This deal I'm working on might not go through. So I figured I'd just take out a temporary option on him."

What J. Edwin really figured, of course, was that he could maybe sew Miguel Morales up inside of such an airtight option. Then if Gus Lennox really put the Musical Matador on his payroll, the Hollywood flesh peddler would pop up with his previous option; but if Gus Lennox didn't, then Mr. Bell wouldn't, either, and he wouldn't have to pay Miguel a nickel.

It was an inspiration; it was terrific! And it was also a strictly heads-I-win, tails-you-lose proposition.

Juan Hermosillo naturally would like this idea: because Juan Hermosillo knew full well that Miguel lacked a work-permit, so the agreement wouldn't be worth the paper it was written on.

"I sell you the option for one thousand dollars," he suggested brightly.

"Make it one thousand pesos," bargained Mr. Bell.

The Mexican flesh peddler debated with himself. Then he debated with Mr. Bell. "Have you *got* one thousand pesos—cash?"

J. Edwin Bell had the equivalent, in U. S. Government endorsed currency.

"Good," said the Latin-American. "I'll write out the option for you."

"No, you don't," corrected J. Edwin Bell warily. "I'll write out my own option—in English."

HE DID so; Juan Hermosillo signed; and thereupon Mr. Bell's lips wreathed into a grin of triumph. Clutching his option in hand, the Hollywoodite victory-marched toward the door. Now all he had to do was shoot Gus Lennox a telegram; and Mr. Bell's mind was already phrasing the telegram.

"Wait, *señor!*" crackled Juan Hermosillo through a smoke screen of *cigarrito* fumes. "Maybe I change my mind and buy back the option for ten pesos—after the bull-fight, of course."

And Señor Hermosillo laughed merrily.

J. Edwin Bell whirled, while horrid hunches herded themselves rapidly in front of his punch-fogged vision.

"W-what?" he chattered. "Say them last words over again!"

Juan Hermosillo said them. "After the bull-fight, *amigo!*"

Mr. Bell remembered several things. He remembered young Miguel's red pants, for one thing. Maybe they weren't just a cantina entertainer's costume, as he had innocently supposed. And also he remembered Señorita Morales warning her brother not to drink too much tequila on account of the *fiesta.* Maybe she meant—well, meant what Juan Hermosillo had just practically got through saying!

"Huh?" J. Edwin swallowed once. "What the—why—you mean that Morales kid is a *real* matador, instead of just a radio one?"

"*Quien sabe?* Who knows?" retorted the Tijuanan. "Today he kills his first bull—maybe."

Mr. Bell's monocled eye made a large round circle of apprehension. Quavered syllables quaked across his quivering lips:

"But—ain't that kind of dangerous? Ain't them bulls got horns?"

For reply Juan Hermosillo opened his arms to their fullest width. "Horns like so, *amigo,*" he reported. "The way Miguel got this job is when I substituted him for a matador that got killed in Mexico City last week."

J. Edwin Bell, however, was no longer listening. Mr. Bell, in fact, was no longer even there. His lank figure was moving at top speed out of the Calle de la Unpronounceable into the main *avenida*—after which he had to slow down, fighting his way through the entire population of Tijuana which was all going the other way.

Mr. Bell had no particular moral objection to bull-fighting. He could take his bull-fights, or leave them alone—except where his financial interests were at stake. But here he'd just got through paying one thousand pesos for an option on Miguel Morales—a guy that Gus Lennox wanted to make a movie star of, besides, and—

"And the umpchay's gotta go make bull-bait of himself at a time like this!" groaned the flesh peddler.

DIVING and twisting, he hurtled his lank frame against the cantina door. It was locked, and adorned with placards in two languages that both said the same thing: *Closed for the Bull-fight.*

Mr. Bell whirled and went along with the crowd, only faster. Urgent appeals for gangway poured from his lips, interspersed with wails of: "Taxi! Taxi!"

There weren't any taxicabs in the procession. Interestingly enough, however, a Drive-Ur-Self sedan bearing Cal-

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ifornia plates braked to a halt alongside the flesh peddler. This machine contained four sturdy youths clad in U. S. Army attire.

"Climb in, guy," said the driver. "I used to drive a hack back in Chicago before I got drafted, so it's second nature I should halt when I hear a guy hollering for a heap like you done."

"Bull-ring!" choked Mr. Bell. "Employees' entrance."

The flesh peddler inserted his breathless form in among the U.S.A. uniforms, and started to figure out a scheme. . . .

"Stick around, you guys," he directed as the Drive-Ur-Self pulled up behind the Tijuana arena. "If you wanta chance to earn yourselves ten easy bucks apiece."

Now, the U. S. Army is well paid—compared to troops elsewhere, who get paid off in chicken feed when they don't get paid off in Heil-Hitlers. Nevertheless, ten bucks is a third of a private's monthly cash income, and this encouraged Mr. Bell to hope that the uniformed detachment would stick around for at least a few minutes. And if it took him longer than that—well, it wouldn't make any difference whether they stayed or not. . . .

"Telegram!" J. Edwin called importantly as he approached the rear entrance to the arena. "Telegram for Señor Miguel Morales." The Tijuana cop at the entrance took a glance at the yellow flimsy in Mr. Bell's skinny fingers, and waved him inside.

Inside was a small, dark, twisting passageaway under the stands. Mr. Bell glimpsed a series of doorways, out of one of which emerged a familiar sound of, *"Salud y pesetas!"*

So he opened that door and stepped briskly within.

Señorita Morales whirled from beside her brother—who was a limp, feebly muttering shape in the darkest corner of the dressing room.

SINKING sensations occurred in the region of Mr. Bell's pocketbook nerve. "Am I too late?" he gasped. "Is it all over?"

The girl shook her head. "Ees not begin," she explained. "Ees too much tequila. He's dronk, from what you say, the Dutch courage."

"Swell!" exclaimed the flesh peddler relievedly.

Señorita Morales had other and more dismal ideas. "You don't know thees Juan Hermosillo! Miguel never wish to fight with ze bool—but Juan Hermosillo make the contract. Now he will have Miguel arrested for false pretending. *Amigo,* you have never been in the Mexican jail, no?"

"Utsnay!" snapped Mr. Bell confidently. Because this was simple. This was so simple he didn't even have to figure out a scheme. "Miguel ain't going to jail," he explained, "because he's going to Hollywood with me. They's some U. S. troops parked in a car outside, and all I gotta tell them is the truth, that Miguel's an American citizen in a jam."

The *señorita's* brunette eyes were pools of doubt. "You theenk they believe?" she asked. "With my brozzer dressed like thees?"

J. Edwin fixed a monocled stare on the musical matador, and began to have his own doubts. All dolled up in his tight red breeches, serape, and monteras, Miguel Morales looked like a far call from an *Americano turista.* And even if the soldiers did believe, would they even get a chance? Might not the cop at the entrance be kind of suspicious?

Mr. Bell thought so; and with him, to think was to act.

"Turn your back, *señorita,*" he commanded curtly.

She did, and J. Edwin got busy.

"Okay, turn around," he grunted.

Mr. Bell was now a guy wearing tight red pants; while Miguel Morales presented a definitely imported appearance, due to the fact that he was garbed in the flesh peddler's recent attire. They weren't exactly the same size, of course. J. Edwin's elegant garments fitted all over Miguel and some extra space besides; while the red pantaloons exposed Mr. Bell's fancy garters, and also some alarmingly bare inches of Mr. Bell himself.

"Upsy-daisy!" he grunted, hoisting the musical matador to his feet. "There! I guess he can walk—if you hold him up. Here's the ten bucks apiece I promised them troops, and here's an address to come to in Hollywood."

J. Edwin clapped his derby atop of Miguel's head, at an angle which concealed most of the guy's face which wasn't already lolling on the *señorita's* shoulder, and thrust the two of them out into the passage.

J. Edwin Bell then paused long enough to wrap the serape around his middle, and to scoop up a practically full bottle of tequila from the corner where Miguel had been. Mr. Bell had a commercial idea that maybe he could sell the tequila back to the cantina where it had come from.

Clutching the bottle in one fist, and hanging onto the serape with the other, the flesh broker eased himself out into the passageway.

SOMETHING told him that his appearance would probably be mistrusted by the cop at the rear entrance, so he swung off in search of a side exit. Devious turns and twists brought him to a latched door.

Mr. Bell opened this door a crack, and peered out into the dazzling Mexican sunshine. A large vacant lot spread itself invitingly in front of him; and he decided that he would be better off on the other side of that lot. And the sooner the better.

Journeying rapidly, the flesh peddler emerged out into the sun glare—and heard himself greeted by a large chorus of voices, all shouting:

*"Ole!"*

The flesh broker hesitated in mid-stride, and swiveled a startled stare toward the sounds, which seemed to come from all four directions.

Shuddering remarks stumbled upon Mr. Bell's usually glib tongue. "Great slithering serpents!" he exclaimed. For his vacant lot had turned out to be the middle of the Tijuana bull ring.

And moreover, it wasn't vacant. Because the scenery in front of J. Edwin's anguished glance included a bull.

Seeing which, Mr. Bell turned like a revolving door and went right back to where he had just come from. Unfortunately, however, the latch had fallen back into place—and its place was on the other side of the heavy oak panel.

"Help!" shouted Mr. Bell. "Throw out a life preserver! Get me out of here, somebody!"

This moving appeal was received with roars of laughter from the several thousand natives and *turistas* parked in the grandstand seats above the high wooden fence around the bull-ring.

Some of this merriment, no doubt, was occasioned by Mr. Bell's appearance. In addition to the too-tight red pants and the badly wrapped serape, J. Edwin's ensemble included various other high notes. He was still wearing his patent leather footgear, for one thing; his two-toned, clocked socks and fancy garters likewise; not to mention a wing-collared shirt, and his monocle.

In fact, the only party present who failed to be amused by the flesh broker's appearance was *el toro,* or the bull.

*El toro* now started over to see what was happening. It is frequently said that the bulls of Tijuana are miserable, undersized, knock-kneed, and generally anemic wretches who would have difficulty fighting their way out of paper bags. But the guys who say this are guys who have never had a level, or down-in-the-ring view of *el toro.*

J. Edwin Bell, anyway, failed to detect any symptoms of anemia in this particular bull. The bull looked to J. Edwin to be only slightly smaller than a locomotive; a

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locomotive covered all over with brown curly hair except where it was covered by large, curling horns. Moreover, this bull was talking to himself in a low grumbling tone.

Mr. Bell decided to circle around the ring in search of an exit that wasn't latched. He lit out, running.

The only thing wrong with this maneuver was that it brought Mr. Bell, and Mr. Bell's borrowed red pants, to the bull's attention.

The bull decided to try and catch up with J. Edwin Bell.

*"Ole!"* exclaimed the crowd.

J. EDWIN shot one glance over his shoulder and turned on some more speed, meanwhile begging the grandstanders to throw him down a rope. Nobody did so; maybe nobody had a rope. "Then gimme a bicycle."

Even as he spoke, however, Mr. Bell glimpsed something that looked like a door knob in the wooden wall. He whirled toward it, just as the bull charged through the space where J. Edwin had just been, hooking his horn into the serape and taking that article along with him.

*"Ole! Ole!"* roared the inhabitants of Tijuana, apparently under the impression that Mr. Bell had done this on purpose.

"Holy is right!" gasped the flesh peddler, staggering to clutch the doorknob with frenzied fingers. It wasn't a doorknob, though. It was just a knothole in the fence.

The bull charged again, aiming with one eye because the other was covered by a flapping serape. J. Edwin Bell did a windshield-wiper dive along the wooden wall. There was a crash, followed by several bellows from the bull.

J. Edwin Bell rolled over, looked up, and saw *el toro* standing practically on top of him. The flesh peddler squeezed his eyes shut and waited. Nothing happened, so he opened his eyes again.

"Great Caesar's ghost!" he gasped.

The bull's horn was stuck in the knothole!

Never slow on the upgrade, Mr. Bell's whirling wits accelerated into their highest gear.

"Ah!" said the flesh peddler. "What's sauce for the matador oughta be sauce for the bull, or vice-versa." For J. Edwin's busy think-tank had nurtured a scheme.

Practically like lightning, he had jerked the cork out of Miguel's tequila bottle. Following which, all he had to do was shove the bottle deeply into *el toro's* mouth and let nature take its course.

*El toro's* frantic backward leap ripped several large planks out of the fence; and Mr. Bell stepped briskly through the opening.

*"Señor!"* a voice exclaimed. *"Amigo,* wait for me!"

J. Edwin's hasty glance disclosed the portly figure of Juan Hermosillo wriggling over the barrier into the arena.

But Mr. Bell didn't wait. Something told Mr. Bell there was probably a Mexican law against getting bulls drunk on tequila; and in the words of Señorita Morales, the flesh peddler had never been in any Mexican jails, no.

He lit out—running. And it is a matter of record that he didn't stop running until he had crossed the International Line at San Ysidro, California.

"YES, Mr. Lennox," said J. Edwin Bell into his phone. (This was the next day, and it was in Hollywood.) "I'll bring the Musical Matador right over for his voice test. I expect him any minute; his sister just called—"

His sister just at that moment ankled brightly into Mr. Bell's office to place a paper-wrapped bundle on the flesh broker's desk. "Here, *señor,*" she explained, "ees the so-beautiful suit, and Miguel say *muchas gracias.*"

"But where's Miguel?" demanded Mr. Bell. "And if that's my suit, what's he wearing?"

The beauteous brunette shrugged. "Miguel? He does not need thees clothes. He has made such friendship with the soldiers who rescue heem—"

"What?" gasped the flesh peddler. "Them guys talked him into joining the army?"

The girl nodded.

J. Edwin Bell rose up from his chair, using harsh and ungentlemanly language. Here, Mr. Bell remarked bitterly, he had paid a thousand pesos for an option on the guy, and saved him from getting killed besides, and what reward did he get?

"The dope joins the army for thirty bucks a month which I can't even collect my commission on!" said the flesh peddler bitterly. "Of all the—"

"Patience, *amigo,*" counseled another voice.

Mr. Bell whirled. There in the doorway stood a plump figure immersed in *cigarrito* fumes and perfume.

"Hermosillo!" he howled. "What are *you* doing here?"

The Latin-American chuckled. "I have come to bring you the career, the riches, the fame! You, *amigo,* are the sensation of Tijuana today!"

*"Me?"*

*"Si, señor.* You see, Señor Bell, always before the big bull-fight comes the preliminary—the comedy. And never before in all history has a matador been so very funny as you. Never before has the bull been killed with the tequila. I can get you the return engagement, with personal appearance in Mexico City herself, everything! Maybe even the European tour, to kill the bulls of Madrid with the tequila, too.

"And for all this," said Juan Hermosillo, unfolding a legal-looking document onto J. Edwin Bell's desk, "I charge you only ten percent!"

From the Private Diary of Gloria N---
1 Broke a date with Jim for tonight. The way my head aches, I don't feel like seeing anybody! I don't feel like seeing anybody! Guess I need a laxative, but I dread the thought of taking one.
2 Aunt Helen told me to try Ex-Lax. I hate the taste of laxatives—but Ex-Lax was a pleasant surprise. It tasted just like fine chocolate.
3 Slept wonderfully all night. Ex-Lax worked fine this morning. No upsets or anything. Headache's all gone, too. Sure hope Jim calls me tonight.
The action of Ex-Lax is thorough, yet *gentle!* No shock. No strain. No weakening after-effects. Just an easy, comfortable bowel movement that brings blessed relief. Try Ex-Lax next time you need a laxative. It's good for *every* member of the family.
10¢ and 25¢
EX-LAX
THE CHOCOLATED LAXATIVE

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# Destroyer!

## By Steve Fisher

### CHAPTER XXVI

#### TURRETS OF THE SEA

IN THE fire-control tower, Commander Bell watched everything at once, sending down his orders to the turrets, and reporting to, and taking orders from, the talker on the captain's circuit.

It was with grim satisfaction that he had seen the first light cruiser go to the bottom. This had been his first objective, and even while the cruiser's planes were diving at the ship over his head, bombing a crater hole in the foc'sle, running into the direct fire of the anti-aircraft guns, he had operated his heavy batteries against the unmoving foe.

The early sun was coming up now, and the fog was clearing. The anti-aircraft guns had wiped the desperate enemy fighter planes from the sky. Near the shore Bell could see bubbles and oil on the water where the cruiser had gone down, and behind this only the chalky white cliffs of the shore.

Up ahead the battleship which had been first in the formation had attacked another of the five cruisers; they had gone into action in much the same manner as this ship. But it testified to Bell's proficiency as gunnery officer that only now, seven long minutes after Bell's job had been completed, had the second attacked cruiser been crippled and finally silenced. It was an Italian vessel, settling slowly, the bridge in flames. Bell could see its crew scrambling over topside to abandon ship.

The two enemy ships had no need to feel shame in the defeat. A light cruiser was no match for a battleship. The division of American battleships had come to annihilate the whole nest of enemy cruisers and they were accomplishing the purpose as quickly as possible so that they might get out.

Two out of five of the cruisers were gone now, and the remaining American battleship had flung herself on another light cruiser. Her turrets were roaring at this very moment, and Bell could see flashes of red, while the thunder of the guns was a din in his ears.

Two cruisers remained. But these were both heavy armament. One had miraculously gotten up steam, and was under way, moving out of the harbor. The other's stacks were belching black smoke, but as yet she had not begun to move. Her anchor chains were crawling like snakes across the foc'sle.

The battleship just ahead—finished with one job—

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trained her guns on the stationary cruiser, to nail her before she got the anchors up and started moving. The cruiser returned fire at once, savagely—trapped, and baring her teeth in puffs of red flame. Her shells were heavier than those of her unfortunate and ill-fated sister ships.

But Commander Bell stared incredulously. He had blandly presumed that the ship ahead would give chase to the rapidly retreating cruiser, and his own batteries would engage the stationary vessel. The talker on the capain's circuit had informed him this would be the case, and Bell had already relayed that to his guns, ordering them to standby for close range. Instead, his target had been snatched away from him.

"Check fire," he said bitterly.

For a moment Commander Bell could scarcely collect his wits. As the situation stood both of the other battleships were in action against the two cruisers, one heavy and one light. His own batteries fell momentarily silent. The captain's own voice sputtered through the circuit and into Bell's ears.

"What do you make of that, Bell? The stationary cruiser was our meat—and Peterson's attacked it!"

"Yes sir. He was closest and probably thought it was best to nail her before she could move."

The other heavy cruiser was clearing the harbor.

"Well," the captain said angrily, "the only thing left for us to do is give chase. We'll swing wide of Peterson's ship and go after that cruiser that thinks she's going to escape."

"She's putting on a lot of steam," Bell said dismally, "and those ships are geared for thirty-five knots." Both he and the captain were only too well aware that the battleship could do no more than twenty-nine.

"I know," the captain said, "she'll outdistance us. But we're compelled to give chase. As she gains we'll have to keep firing an increasingly longer range. I'll send up observation planes to spot the firing."

TEN minutes later they were clearing the harbor. The cruiser was far ahead of them, dead abeam for a bow shot. Bell swore. That meant he could use only Turrets One and Two. Three and Four, on the after decks, were useless to him. He couldn't even get an angle for the five-inch batteries.

If the ship were to veer on port or starboard rudder it would only enable the cruiser to put more distance between them. Moreover, the speeding cruiser was laying a smoke screen. Range could be calculated against the fleeing enemy only by the sheerest guesswork. Every minute that passed was putting the heavy cruiser farther ahead.

Behind, in the harbor, the other two battleships were still engaged with their trapped quarry. Bell gazed ahead at his disappearing target and cursed eloquently and bitterly. The battleship was straining, putting on every ounce of steam.

"Fire Turrets One and Two," the voice on the captain's circuit said.

"Turrets One and Two commence firing," Commander Bell said on the fire-control telephone.

Both turrets fired at once. The ship shook, the guns recoiled, and the salvo was sailing across the water ahead of them. Now the guns roared again, and the second salvo sped after the shells of the first. In a few moments a third blast shook the ship's very bulkheads and fire flashed red from the mouths of the fourteen-inch guns.

The instructions for the firing had come from the plotting room, deep in the ship, where men worked with instruments calculating the range from every available source of information—the range finders, observation planes, and even the bridge itself. It was complicated mathematics, had to be quickly worked out. The arithmetic of war.

Now the fourth salvo sped from the guns, and Commander Bell watched through powerful glasses. He saw small blobs of red—the cruiser was returning fire. In the same moment he learned that the battleship's salvos were falling short. The cruiser was almost enveloped in her screen now and only the flash of her after-turret guns were visible.

Shells began to plop on the starboard side of the battleship. The cruiser's first salvo! A thousand yards behind came the second enemy salvo. With sudden numb horror Bell saw that they had corrected their range.

In the next moment eight-inch shells were tearing into the ship. The fire control tower shuddered. A shell smashed squarely into the bridge. Flames leapt everywhere. The captain's circuit went dead.

Commander Bell stumbled blindly, he gripped a stanchion and stood up. His arm shielding his face, he fought his way out of the flaming tower. The ship was at hard right rudder, churning up water, already under control of the emergency watch in the fortressed conning tower. The cruiser's third salvo flew over the quarterdeck, splashing in the water on the other side.

Bell was on the outside ladder. He would go to the conning tower, navigate the ship and command his guns from there. But as he reached the signal deck he saw a sailor pointing toward the horizon and shouting.

Commander Bell stared, aghast. The battle tops of the entire enemy fleet, on their way at this moment to resume the attack they had yesterday abandoned, were steaming this way.

The big ships were moving rapidly, already having received the distress call from the cruiser. For a moment, the bridge in flames over his head, Bell just stared. The battleship was far too slow to get away. She was a turtle, and those ships moving across the horizon were hares. The other modernized American battleships, just now steaming out of the harbor, their work done, were in the same dire predicament.

Commander Bell set his lips grimly. There was no use trying to run. Let the bridge burn to hell. He rushed down and into the fireproof conning tower. It was roasting hot inside, and he closed and bolted the door behind him.

He stared out through the eye-slits. The captain had been killed on the bridge. Bell was in command. In command of a ship that now faced certain annihilation.

He turned swiftly to the emergency-watch officer.

"Steam directly into the teeth of the enemy!" He picked up the emergency fire-control phone. "Stand by on all guns," he said.

Behind the conning tower, on the ship's stack, there was a gunnery E with a hash mark under it. E is for Efficiency.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### CALL ME A TRAITOR

NICK'S face was sweaty, his voice desperate. He stood before Craig's desk. "But I tell you Stohl's got her!"

"I heard you the first time and the answer's still the same. The thing's a trap. He thinks you're fool enough to walk into it—and if you do you'll be killed!"

"That's the chance I take."

"You'll take no chance!" Craig roared. "I'll lock you up if I have to. You're working for the government and you'll have to forget sentiment."

"*Sentiment.* I—"

"You'll have to wait! Tomorrow we'll be able to close in on Stohl so that he can't get out. I've spent valuable time and effort making the arrangements for this and

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I'll be damned if I'm going to have it spoiled by this!"

"But she might be killed!"

"What if she is? This is a war and she's only one person. People are dying like flies. I tell you, if we jump the gun on Stohl the whole thing'll fall through."

"What the hell does that matter, when—"

"It matters to your country."

"Oh my God! She's alive. I tell you, I have—"

"One of Stohl's agents told you she was alive, didn't he? They're tried to kill you in other ways, and now they're holding her out as bait."

Nick turned on his heel and walked to the end of the room.

"It's only until tomorrow," Craig went on. "Then there may even be a chance to save the girl."

Nick turned bitterly. "You know you're lying."

"Listen, Nick; stick with me. If we make this coup tomorrow you're free to go. But I can't make it without some of the information you have about Stohl's agents; and I need your testimony in the military trials. You're my key man in this roundup. Don't you suppose Stohl knows that? Why do you think it's so important that he get you out of the way?"

Nick's hands were white with pressure. He saw the key to the office which Craig had laid on the desk when he came in.

"What makes you so sure I'd be killed? Perhaps I could—"

"You could do nothing! If you went you'd be double-crossing me—and the government."

Nick backed up. "Well, then, damn it, you're looking at a traitor."

He took a knife from his pocket. While Craig stared, he slashed the phone wires. Then he slipped through the door. Craig shouted, and Nick locked the door from the outside with the key he had taken from the desk. He swung down the wooden corridor. Craig was crashing against the door. Nick walked through the reception room, down the steps, and outside.

He caught a taxi.

NICK stood in front of the green Café Madrid sign, watching the windows of an apartment across the street. The apartment rooms were on the second floor, over a shabby, empty store. The windows were shut, and the shades were drawn, the morning sun beat hot against them. Nick's gun was in the pocket of his coat.

He glanced at the roof over the shabby upstairs apartment, and he saw that it was thatched, with a fifteen-degree slant; he noticed that it was isolated from all other roofs, and the sheer drop to the ground was not a thing to contemplate.

He also saw that there was a little square trap door that must have led to the roof from one of the hallways. He supposed that in case of fire on the first floor a man could go up on the roof, come to the front of it, and jump down into a firemen's net. On the right side of the building there was a fire escape, but it extended only as far as the windows so that you could not very well drop from the roof to the fire escape without breaking your neck.

He studied the building very carefully, and then, at last, he turned and went into the Café Madrid. He walked with a quick stride to the back office and pushed open the door. The bartender sat there, a piece of rubber hose in his dirty aproned lap, watching Tony, the Italian bellboy. Tony's face was black and blue and his uniform was tattered. Some of the brass buttons had torn off. The bartender looked up.

"All right," Nick said.

"Sure, Mr. Nick."

"Did you have to hit him again?"

"Yes, he tried to get away and I hit him twice."

The bartender left.

The bellboy stared at Nick with terror in his liquid brown eyes. He wiped blood from his swollen mouth with the back of his hand. Nick took the gun from his pocket and undid the safety latch. The boy screamed.

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to kill you," Nick said.

"No, don't kill me." He began to sob. "I had to tell the girl what I did because they made me."

Nick had previously only vaguely suspected that Tony might be in foreign pay. But when he learned about Kathie—knowing how careful she was—he at once realized she could only have been lured out of the hotel one way. He had seized the boy, taken him out in the alley, and in a very few minutes had him talking. He had chipped the skin from his knuckles hitting him.

"You're sure the girl's in that apartment across the street?"

"Yes, I went with them last night, and that's where they took her."

"You say it was about half-past twelve?"

"Yes."

"They've got a phone there?"

"Yes. I was to hang around your room and if I could get any information that you might be coming after the girl I was to call and tell them."

Nick had not needed Tony to discover the address of the place where Kathie was held prisoner. Stohl had carefully arranged that he could obtain this address in half a dozen ways, all of them thinly disguised.

"You're going to phone now," Nick said.

"No!"

"You're going to phone and say I came into my room and left again, and you followed me, and I'm now in a certain bar in Colon. The Liberty Bar. You're going to say I've been given orders *not* to go after the girl and as a result I'm getting very drunk in the Liberty Bar."

"No!"

Nick lashed out and hit Tony across the face.

After a while Tony phoned.

NICK and Tony watched from the window of the Café Madrid. Four men came down the steps of the apartment and climbed into a car. They drove off. None of them was Stohl.

Tony—a gun prodded in his back—said that there were probably three men still in the apartment; it had occurred to Stohl that Nick might try to storm the place with force. For this reason Herr Stohl himself would not risk staying there. He didn't lack courage, but he shrewdly weighed his own value to his government and reasoned that there was no point of being in a possible exchange of gunfire when others could do the work as well as himself.

The car was out of sight, headed for the Liberty Bar in Colon.

"All right," Nick said, "we're going across the street."

"No!"

"No?"

"I'll go! I'll go!"

The shades in the apartment on the right side of the building were still drawn and Nick and Tony moved across the street very swiftly. Before they went upstairs Nick made Tony take off his shoes and carry them. Nick also removed his own shoes and they climbed the stairs in stocking feet.

In the hall on the second floor they stood quietly for a full minute, Nick's gun in the bellboy's back. Then they moved silently forward. Nick looked up to the ceiling and saw the trap door to the roof. He reached up a

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long arm and unlatched it. Now he motioned for Tony to put his shoes on.

When this was done Nick put his gun in his pocket and hoisted Tony up to the trap door. The bellboy, glad to escape, opened it and clattered noisily out onto the roof. Nick quickly hurried down the hall and rounded the corner, his gun in his hand again.

Immediately a door opened. Nick heard the voices of two men who spoke in clipped German. They said there was somebody on the roof. Undoubtedly Nick Waters. The trap door was hanging open. There was the sound of one of the men climbing up through the space. The other followed. When Nick heard them on the roof he rounded the corner in the hall. He slammed shut the trap door and shot the bolt in place.

The door of the apartment was open and he moved in through it. A man stood across the room, his head stuck out the window, watching the fire escape. Nick stepped up behind him and slugged him with the butt of his gun. The man slumped to the threadbare carpet on the floor.

Now Nick opened the door to an adjoining room. He caught his breath. Kathie sat in a chair near the window. She was tied up, and there was a gag in her mouth. Nick laid his gun on the bed and began working with the ropes. His heart was thumping against his side.

The bellboy had been right. Stohl wasn't here. He just had time to get Kathie out and save his own skin for Craig—for military trials. He worked quickly and silently with Kathie's bonds. Once she said: "Nick!" Now she rose, and he turned. His gun was gone off the bed.

Herr Mark Stohl stood on the doorway, the weapon in his hand.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### MARK AND FIRE

LATER, it was history. The American battleship, her bridge in flames, turned in the water and steamed directly toward the huge double column of the enemy battle tops. Shells plopped on either side of her; and in the rear, the other two battleships, observing the movement, read Commander Bell's intention on the fluttering pennant hoist. From the signal decks, by semaphore wig-wag, came the immediate reply: *Joining your attack.*

There were three heavy battleships then, in single-file formation, rising and falling on the sea as they pounded toward the enemy fleet.

In the double column, three thousand yards apart in each case, the first enemy ships in line were giant battle cruisers. These two super dreadnaughts towered over any battleship.

They had been recently constructed, were scarcely five months in service, and they had been manufactured for the sole purpose of making a naval spearhead on the attack against America. They were the two largest ships in the world. Behind them came pocket battleships, heavy cruisers, light cruisers, submarines and destroyers. It was not intended that this should be a battle, but an onslaught. Their plans, each maneuver they would execute, had been carefully worked out in advance.

But to be attacked before reaching their objective by three old battleships was something they had not planned for. Even though they realized that the Americans, trapped, were making a desperate last stand, there was scarcely time for a board of strategy to cope with the situation. They went into action at once to wipe out the bothersome contingent. There was really very little else they could have done.

Commander Bell, in the conning tower, stripped off his coat; he was not conscious of the fact that his face and arms had been scorched getting down the ladder from the bridge. The conning tower was like an oven. Wisps of blue smoke seeped in through it, making the air acrid.

The seaman on the steering lever, bare to his waist, glistened with sweat. His eyes smarted in the smoke and he kept rubbing them. The officer of the deck watched through an eye-slit.

Bell consulted his instruments, gauged his speed against the enemy, planned to the precise second when his batteries would open up. His brain and all of his effort were on the operation of his ship in this its last action.

The navigator reported. "Mr. Bell—"

"Yes?"

"The four destroyers have joined our unit."

"Tell them—damn it!—tell them to go home. They're not in this predicament. They've got speed enough to get away. This attack isn't a stunt. It's the only sane thing left for us to do."

"Aye, aye, sir."

The O. O. D. turned. "What are your orders, Commodore?"

Bell mopped sweat from his face. "I don't think any of us'll get much past those two leader ships. Those big babies are hell on wheels. But if we do—we're going *in between* that column.

"Yes, I know! They'll eat us up that much quicker. But it'll enable us to inflict more damage—and that's the whole point. We're going to fire broadside—port and starboard runs simultaneously."

"Yes, sir!"

"Inform all guns to change to pointer fire. It'll be closest range they ever fired, and I'm going to depend on the men rather than a mechanical robot. Robot firing is fine in practice but it has a tendency to go awry when a ship is hit. Tell the men that. Tell them—here, I'll take the phone—"

The navigator returned. "The four destroyers are racing ahead of us. They insist on joining the action, sir."

"They're fools!" Bell stormed. But he smiled grimly. "But we'll be glad to have 'em along," he said.

AMERICAN planes that an hour ago had taken off from the flight decks of the *USS Ranger* and *USS Lexington* roared overhead, and the ocean was suddenly dark with the bobbing shadow of their wings.

The flight commander looked down over the side of his plane and he saw the scene quite clearly. The three battleships below him, plowing toward the enemy, the four slim American destroyers racing ahead. Through his goggles the flight commander watched this, proud somehow. He grinned and with his gloved hand waved a salute to his shipmates below.

He did not know how long they could hold out, certainly not long enough, but he thought it appropriate to radio them a word of cheer, and this message he dispatched at once: That the movement of the main enemy fleet had been spotted hours ago by an observer, and the United States Atlantic Squadron was at this moment en route at full steam to engage them.

Somewhere over the horizon the United States ships were on their way. "Try to hold out," the flight commander urged. Then, his message sent, he signaled his squadron of fighters and ordered them in a full attack on the enemy.

First came the planes, roaring, whining, diving, bombing, machine-gunning; meeting enemy fighter planes, dog-fighting. Then the destroyers, two abreast, guns screaming, torpedoes loosed, mines dumped, laying down two heavy screens of smoke in between which the battleships

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would come. Six minutes later all four destroyers had been blasted to bits, ripped to shreds.

And then the battleships came, each roaring in double broadside.

In Number Three Turret the pits were hot, the lights dim, the breeches gaped open. Men in skivie shirts worked desperately, stumbling through the turning, slewing turret. Powder conveyers ground dully. Breeches were stuffed. Plugs thumped into place. Now the third salvo . . . Fire on the Buzzer!

*Bzzzzzzzzz. . .*

"Mark!"

The crashing, tumultuous weight of the turret careening forward, vomiting tons of steel; then settling back, angrily, waiting like a fighter between rounds, waiting while men tinkered on her, while droning mechanism performed its task, while silk powder bags were stuffed into her gullet.

But a man had screamed. A man had been crushed in the recoil.

"Get him out of the way—poor devil." It was the pointer on the first barrel. He had been thrown in the path of the gun as it recoiled.

"Number Three . . . Number Three. . ." a harrassed voice shouted through the tube. "What's the delay?"

"No delay, sir. . . . Mr. Barrett, replace that pointer. I know you're an officer, Barrett! But we haven't got anybody else. Take the gun sight yourself."

"Right!"

EAGERLY Jeff leapt into the pointer's position. He threw off his officer's cap. His dungarees were wet with sweat. He began patting the gun, talking to it. "Come on, baby. We're going to town, baby!"

His hands turned on the pointer's wheel. He looked out through the eye-piece. The breeches were slamming closed. The ship was moving very fast. Jeff saw a big battle cruiser cross-wired. They had her amidships. They got her in the guts.

*Bzzzzzzzzz . . .*

"Mark!" Jeff shouted.

The shells screamed from the three barrels of the gun. The monster of steel came shuddering back into place. Jeff watched through the sight. The sea was red with puffs of smoke. The destroyer screen was dissolving; it became thinner with each passing second. The three battleships were naked now in the eyes of the enemy. Jeff glancd across at his setter, riding the little iron seat. He gave him the elevation figure.

*Bzzzzzzzzz . . .*

"Mark!"

The gun roared again, venomously. All over the ship guns were blasting in a terrible din. Breeches swung open, smoky, powder-scorched; hydraulic rammers pounded; drill shells rolled onto trays. The hungry, open maws of the guns were fed powder and steel. Commander Bell's voice kept echoing through the tube. Jeff kept his eyes on the sight. The big battle cruiser was listing badly. But her giant guns spoke again. *Range for bow shot.*

*Bzzzzzzzzz . . .*

"Mark!" Jeff said.

He squeezed a button. The turret rolled out, quivering, and the salvo volcanoed from her. Sweat drenched Jeff's face and back. They were moving one way, the battle cruiser another; they were already out of her range, and a pocket battleship, her guns flashing red, crawled into the focus of the eye-piece, wavered on the cross-wires. "Got her!" Jeff said.

*Bzzzzzzzzz . . .*

"Mark!"

He remembered saying that. And the gun fired on the buzzer; but he never knew how. For at that moment the whole ship shuddered from stem to stern from the impact of a heavy salvo. Perhaps the last salvo of shells from the battle cruiser. The turret went black.

Darkness. Pitch darkness. Men's voices. The powder conveyers still grinding. The turret recoiled shakily. Somebody over the voice tube was saying, "Direct hit Number Three . . . Direct hit on the pocket battleship. The—" The voice stopped.

Bells began to gong. They sounded faint. *Maybe it's the thunder in my ears, but they sound faint.* Fire and collision parties were being summoned. The series in which the gongs rang told them automatically in what station they were needed. *Shell hole through the bow. Rush collision mats.* All right! To hell with that. So there was a hole in the bow. It was only one compartment. The compartment was watertight.

The pits were still dark. The fire-control phone began to talk. It squeaked. "Number Four report! Number Four . . ." It faded off. Turret Four was silent. Turret Four was a fresh graveyard. Every man in its pits had been killed. The lower handling rooms crew was all right. They were always all right. They would have to sit on their hands and wait for the battle to end. *End?*

IN NUMBER THREE the iron powder conveyers were still walking upstairs with their baskets of powder. The mechanism of the drillers buzzed and whispered. Men were trying to load in the dark. Now the emergency lights came on. Jeff saw three loaders on deck, heads mashed by the turret's recoil. They had to be gotten out of the way.

All of this had happened—the lights gone down and come on again, the men above in Number Four killed in six seconds. Now, miraculously, on schedule, the guns finished loading. Breeches closed like the doors of time vaults. Jeff worked with the pointer's wheel. He cross-wired the speeding pocket battleship once more. He was firing at right angles, over the bow.

*Bzzzzzzzzz . . .*

"Mark!"

The turret leapt forward. It discharged its volley of death. It settled back. But it seemed to have lost some of its power. The metal screeched as the heavy barrels came to rest in the steel cradles. They were perhaps a thousandth of an inch out of line. The handwriting on the wall, Jeff thought. But they couldn't stop now. Anderson had noticed, but he was very cool. Everything was proceeding normally. There might be a misfire—possibly death for them all—but there was no stopping.

If an enemy shell should hit the turret with enough force that flame inside would ignite the powder, it would roar down the conveyer treadmill in a step-ladder of violent explosions and set off the powder magazine. Such an occurrence would immediately blow the entire ship to ribbons. That, too, would be death.

*Bzzzzzzzzz . . .*

"Mark!"

The gun sprang once more, and hobbled back. The voice tube was taking. Triumphantly. "The Nazi battle cruiser has been sunk! The battleship following in our wake finished her off!" It was something better than a pep talk. The men began to work with renewed energy.

Jeff was at the eye-piece. He was talking to the gun, cajoling it. "Be good, baby. Don't peter out on papa." He watched the boiling sea. The enemy parade seemed endless. A cruiser was sailing into his cross-wire of vision. Jeff trained the gun with a steady hand.

He could hear the two other pointers talking to the turret as they trained. Jeff was training on the cruiser. Then, suddenly—because the cruiser was so close—Jeff was eager to experiment with one shell. Instead of fol-

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lowing the range along the ship's side where he couldn't miss, he raised his sight to fire directly on the after fighting turrets.

The slightest movement of either this ship or the cruiser from the established course would send the shell to waste. He had no right doing this. He grew tense, training down to a point of fine precision.

*Bzzzzzzzzz . . .*

"Mark!"

He watched, feverishly. Then he shouted. A hundred-to-one shot! The shell had penetrated the cruiser's turret. In the next moment the powder magazine was ignited. In a horrible exposion of splintering red the whole disintegrated ship was lifted a full forty feet out of the water. It showered down in a rain-fall of burning debris. That was the end of the cruiser. It was vanished, gone from the face of the sea.

JEFF'S grin at his setter was his only show of exultation. Already they were training for the next ship in line. But behind him he heard Lieutenant Anderson talking on the fire-control phone. He knew nothing of the cruiser's destruction, and his voice was irritable.

"That was Jeff Barret—the hero of the *S-60*," he said bitterly. "He's the only pointer I've got for this position. I saw him deliberately change the angle of his barrel."

"Very bad," Commander Bell's voice roared down hollowly. "All he did was blow up a cruiser."

The battleship was wallowing badly now, however. It was bleeding in water by the ton. They hadn't much longer. Already two of the turrets had been silenced. Now Number Three was on its last legs. Jeff was cross-wiring a new heavy cruiser. He heard the breeches close. The buzz was delayed, then it came.

"Mark!"

The gun started forward; and then, all at once, it jammed. There was a sudden twisting of steel; a discordant clash of delicate mechanism. The emergency lights crashed out. Men were screaming. A sheet of flame sucked back over the empty gun cradles. Jeff closed his teeth hard. The flame shot into his face. He clawed at it. For a moment he knew the sensation of burning alive.

Then he was conscious again, on the oily deck. The steel plates in the pits had buckled. Water was drenching down from the sprinkler fire-control system. It was the water that had revived him. There was only darkness and the dripping water. Someone was moaning . . . whimpering. Silence. The clatter of the water as it came down.

Fortunately the flame had never reached the powder to touch it off. Jeff sat very still in the darkness. He smelled burned flesh. The dead lay all around him. Setters, rammermen, loaders. The powder conveyers had stopped. The pit was a twisted mass.

The water kept sprinkling down. The metallic voice in the tube kept saying over and over, desperately: "Number Three report . . . Number Three report . . . Number Three . . "

•

Admiral John Syril in the flagship of the Atlantic Squadron watched the swelling green of the horizon through his binoculars. Gradually, the enemy fleet was becoming visible over the rim of the sea.

Admiral Syril's ships were making all speed possible to join the engagement. In a few minutes they would be in it—firing at long range. But from his aircraft spotters and from the radios of the three battleships themselves he had received reports that gave him a clear picture of the situation.

The four destroyers were gone. One of the battleships had been sunk, and the other two were sinking. At this very moment they were abandoning ship as best as they could. But the damage they had inflicted was incalculable. One giant battle cruiser (pride of the Nazis), one pocket battleship, one heavy cruiser, and three fast light cruisers. Six of the enemy's capital ships!

Added to that were the four cruisers (one had escaped from the original five) that the battleships had sunk early this morning. The Axis powers had paid a dear price for three American battleships.

The enemy still had ships, of course. But their main force had been reduced in number. The invaders were rapidly being whittled down in tonnage to the size of their American opponents. They no longer held a crushing superiority. The battle into which Admiral Syril was sailing would be bitter, but he had the sweet satisfaction of knowing that the match would at least be equal. Neither his ships nor his men would face annihilation.

He put down the binoculars, and turned.

"Signal all ships: *Take Battle Stations. Stand by to Attack!*"

## CHAPTER XXIX

### A MAN'S WAR, AND A NATION'S

HERR Stohl's gray face was coldly angry, his eyes glittered a peculiar bluish color. He was a man who never wasted his time. The death of Nick Waters was only one small item on the crowded program he had laid out for himself.

He was aware that the moment the Axis powers' Fleet secured its first crushing victory there woud be much for him to do in preparation for the German troops that would be landed in Colon to take over the Panama Canal. Already huge transports full of men lay off Newfoundland awaiting word to move.

Herr Stohl was impatient to return to his affairs. He was angry that it had been necessary to spend so much time arranging the death of only one man; he could have had two hundred murdered with far less effort. He spoke softly, a speech to prelude death.

"You displayed considerable ingenuity in ridding this apartment of seven of my men."

Nick bowed curtly. "Thank you," he said. Kathie stood numbly at his side. Outside the sun burned hot against the drawn shades; the air was very close and specks of dust sifted like silver toward the ceiling. On the dresser a tin clock ticked loudly.

"I was in the room across the hall," Stohl said. He spoke as though to point out that his intelligence was superior to Nick's. "Even my agents were unaware of my presence here."

"When one works for the Nazis he must be careful, even of his friends," Nick said.

"You are very American," Herr Stohl said. His lips were thin. "Intolerable, arrogant, and a fool!" He lifted the gun half an inch in his hand. His face was without expression.

With a sweep of his arm Nick knocked Kathie down and dove low at the German. The gun cracked, but Nick had counted on the fraction of a second that it would take Stohl to shift his aim. The bullet ripped an inch over his back, quivered into the wall, and in the next instant Nick was grappling at Stohl's legs. In a judo grip, lightning quick, he caught him on the flexible joints behind either knee.

Stohl went over backward, his head smashing against the door jamb. His hand came up, the gun wobbling in it, and the second bullet spun over Nick's shoulder. And

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now Nick, on the floor, pounded back Stohl's gun wrist. He banged Stohl's hand on the threadbare carpet and the nerveless fingers splayed open.

Nick scooped up the gun. Stohl was writhing savagely, his left hand at the holster of his own gun; and then the German Luger appeared. Nick wasted no time and took no chances. He shot Stohl through the face.

The thunder of the shot died away. Stohl lay still, his face unrecognizable now. Silence settled through the room. There was the ticking of the clock.

Nick got up slowly. He felt no emotion, no thrill; the victory nauseated him. He turned to Kathie. Her face was deathly white. Nick made some small, mute gesture; afterward he did not remember what it was. The room was very hot. He motioned Kathie toward the door.

Then he heard voices, men were coming in. Nick's body tensed again. He stood with his legs astride Stohl's body, waiting. His finger tightened on the gun trigger. Then, in the instant that he fired, when it was too late to relax his trigger finger, he turned the gun down, and the bullet went into the floor. He dropped the weapon and turned toward the window, turned his back to the men, biting his fist, choked suddenly and unreasonably with emotion.

Craig said: "You didn't think we were going to let you do this thing alone . . . The coup's finished. We had the phone tapped here and picked up four of the men in the Liberty Bar in Colon. You've got a bellboy and two others on the roof. They can't get off and once we get—Well, I'll be damned! It's Stohl! His face is kind of—It *is* Stohl, isn't it?"

"Yes," Nick said.

"That was a hell of a thing you did," Craig said. "If you were any good in this business you wouldn't have done it. But when you jumped the gun I figured it was whatever plan you made against my own, and I played it that way. Nick, what's the matter with you?"

"Nothing," Nick said, "I'm fine."

"You don't sound fine."

"But I am, though," Nick said. He turned. Listen, Craig, I almost killed you, I—"

"Why you damned fool," Craig said. "Your cheeks are wet!"

LATE afternoon sun, red in the coco palms; long scarlet shadows of sunset. Traffic in Cristobal . . . Panamanian cops under beach umbrellas in the intersections . . . Americans in white linen . . . the peddlers with their gaudy shawls . . . the red and green squawking parakeets . . . women in wide brim hats . . . sailors in tropic whites beginning to come ashore, and soldiers off duty . . . anti-aircraft gun crews sitting on roof tops, smoking cigarettes, chatting.

Kathie and Nick sat at the bar in the Café Madrid The tables were crowded, the waiters moving in and out. Now the bartender turned on the radio. The old crowd, the regular crowd quieted, grew expectant. A hush fell over the room. The announcer's voice burst from the loudspeaker with excitement.

*News of the world: Honolulu, Hawaii. The battle in the Pacific is finished. First contingents of the Pacific Fleet tonight sailed triumphantly into Honolulu Harbor and reports have been made of the worst and most terrible naval defeat in the history of the world! The Japanese Fleet has been totally annihilated.*

A hoarse cheer went up through the room. For a moment the radio voice was drowned out, then you could hear it again.

*Admiral Wilson, former Commander of the Asiatic Squadron who was CinC of the Pacific Fleet, announced tonight that the victory—unparalleled in memory of man—was the result of a theory he had seen proved in Asiatic waters time and again: The Japanese are not marksmen.*

*They have for years been waging an unsuccessful war against the Chinese whose marksmanship is equally bad. The Nipponese have operated air raids over cities in China where there were no fighter planes to hamper them and no anti-aircraft guns—and yet they repeatedly failed to hit a single military objective.*

*By keeping the engagement at long range and making his ships a difficult target Admiral Wilson made certain of victory; the Japanese had lost before they began. The majority of Japanese ships have not been installed with latest range-finding and fire-adjusting mechanisms.*

*They were fired by Japanese pointers who could scarcely see their opponent let alone take aim. The American ships, on the other hand, as has long been their tradition, fired accurately, sinking one Japanese ship after another.*

*In this instance, it was pointed out by Admiral Wilson, Japan's first-line fleet was much over-rated and actually was little more than a floating junk heap. Her two finest battleships were twenty years old. Two others were twenty-four years old, a third two twenty-six years old—and there were several ancient coal burners twenty-eight and thirty years old. It took no more than a shell or two to sink them. What began as a serious battle turned into a turret picnic for American sailors. The Japanese were massacred.*

*In the destructive action the American navy lost only two cruisers, the crews of which have been rescued. When the Japanese had been defeated, and ships were sinking on every side, Admiral Wilson ordered a flotilla of cruisers to seek out hidden Japanese aircraft carriers. This maneuver is now being carried out and one has been discovered and sunk.*

*In the vicinity of Wake Island two American submarines came upon seven large Japanese troop ships. Their convoy had left them to join the main engagement of the distressed Japanese Fleet. The submarines sank all seven of the transports one by one.*

*SHANGHAI, China: Under the escort of the United States Asiatic Squadron—which until now has seen little action—a million Chinese troops are embarking aboard every available craft for immediate invasion of Japan. General Chiang Kai-Shek announced that he would personally lead his troops to the heart of Tokyo.*

*Manila, P. I.: Units of the Asiatic Squadron, with the aid of aircraft from the base at Singapore, have trapped seventy-five thousand Japanese troops attempting a wholesale evacuation of Manila.*

*Tokyo, Japan: The Japanese government has officially, according to signed agreement, called upon her European partners for immediate military aid in the Far East.*

*Tokyo, Japan: Tokyo is undergoing the worst air raid in her history. The city has been turned into an inferno.*

*Shanghai, China: Persons in official circles were of the opinion here tonight that the Empire of the Rising Sun is coming to her final inglorious end. They state that the time has passed for Japan to sue for peace. That it is too late, and that Japanese dominance will be wiped from the face of the earth.*

*Here's a dispatch from a military base somewhere on the Alaskan Coast. Russian tanks have been junked. Communist Troops are reported in full flight from wave after wave of American forces led by the United States Marines.*

*Moscow, Russia. The first small rift in the combination of Axis powers was reported here tonight when it was learned that Russian Foreign Commissar Molotoff was preparing a paper making certain territorial demands on the Japanese Government.*

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*Rio de Janeiro, Brazil: Brazil has declared war on Germany and Italy. In making this announcement to the press it was revealed that declarations of war against the Axis powers were expected within the hour from Uruguay, Peru and other South American republics.*

*Berlin, Germany. The German Admiralty tonight admitted it had received reports of a surprising naval setback in action today in the Atlantic and indicated that the advertised invasion of America might be temporarily postponed.*

*But the German Government warned that this was not to be taken as a sign of weakness—and that the war against America would be prosecuted with full strength. As if to back up this statement air-raid sirens were heard tonight in New York, Brooklyn, Boston, Philadelphia, Newark, Norfolk, and even in Washington, D. C. Planes droned over these half a dozen cities in what were described as revenge raids, with Messerschmitts diving low and machine-gunning the streets.*

"THE war's still on," Nick said. He ordered a drink. "We've won the first round—staved them off for a while, but it's only the beginning. As the commentator said—war is not won by defense alone."

"What about Japan?"

"It's not so surprising," Nick said. "Military men have always expected a fold-up like that. First, the Japs deliberately over-sold themselves for purposes of bluff. Even their miserable excursions into China didn't discourage them, and when they joined the Axis they got very cocky. They began to believe they were really a power."

Nick stuck a cigarette in his mouth. "It was like a scrub high school team playing USC. Anyway, it'll give the Chinese a chance to settle up a lot of old scores."

"Yes, I guess so."

"But our war over here goes on. It may never be as bad again—ships from the Pacific will reinforce the Atlantic Squadron—and a thoroughly aroused America will continue to fight for the land it loves. The totalitarians have found out that we're a new, fresh people. We're not rotten and decayed like the spoils they claimed in Europe. We're Americans, Kathie, and we ought to be glad of it."

"I am," she said, "oh, I am!" and there were tears in her eyes. She looked up. "What do you intend doing, Nick?"

"I'm getting out. I've finished what little I could do, and now, for me at least, it's over. Craig wanted me to join the air force. But it's no soap. Kathie, I—I'm tired."

"Oh, Nick!"

"I'm going to get myself the things I've always wanted. I'm going to sit down for once in my life."

"Nick—"

"Yes?"

She bit her lip. "Can I go with you?"

"Can you—"

"Will you marry me, Nick?"

"Kathie, don't—"

"I want to marry you, Nick! I want to!"

"Kathie, all my life, ever since Madrid—"

He pulled her off the stool and took her in his arms. He ran his hand through her hair, and kissed her. He held her close to him. "Kathie . . . Kathie," he said.

## CHAPTER XXX

### THE LUCKY ONES

IT WAS three days later. They had waited in Cristobal only so that they might call Jeff. Yesterday they had received a radio that he had been picked up from a lifeboat; he was on his way in.

Nick's bags were packed and downstairs in the hotel lobby. He sat in Kathie's room now, his long legs thrown over a chair, nursing a drink. Kathie was packing. Her battered aviation luggage had hotel and steamer posters stuck all over it—a gaudy array of names like *Moscow, Biarritz, Queen Mary, Shanghai, Normandie, Paris, Berlin.* Things from the past.

For her too, it was over. Last night she had typed the concluding sentence on the last article she would ever write. It was late afternoon, and the radio, turned low, was playing dance music.

"We'll walk in the snow on Madison Avenue," Nick said. "And when there's an opening night we'll be there in evening dress. And Kathie—you can write your memoirs."

She shook out a skirt, and began folding it. "The Life and Times of Kathrine Winters."

"And there won't be any more Madrid. We'll have a place in Westchester maybe, and we'll have parties; and sometimes we won't answer the phone or the doorbell. We'll just be there by ourselves. We'll—"

The phone rang. Kathie picked it up. "Yes," she said. "Yes, send him up." She put the instrument down. She was trembling now.

"Jeff?"

"Yes—he's on his way up."

Nick put aside his glass and rose. He walked the room nervously. Suddenly he took Kathie in his arms and kissed her tenderly on the lips.

"Remember—we'll tell him right out! Tell him how it is."

"I'll tell him—no matter what. I promise you, Nick. Jeff'll understand!"

"Okay. Straighten up now. Put on a big smile. The guy's been to the wars, you know."

There was a knock at the door. Nick stiffened. Kathie squeezed his hand, and then she went to the door and opened it.

Jeff stood there. He wore his white tropic uniform and it was immaculate, with gold-lieutenant-commander bars on the shoulder pads. He had been promoted two ranks. His face was still sunburnt, blistered, and he wore colored glasses. The hair at his temples had turned white.

"Jeff—"

"Kathie!" he said, and his voice broke. He took her in his arms, choking. She stood numbly, and he held her for a very long time. Then she asked him to come in, and she crossed the room in front of him.

Jeff came slowly behind her, and Nick watched him. Jeff's hands were groping out eagerly. Once he almost stumbled. He was groping toward Kathie, a smile on his face. He was blind.

"We won a battle," he said.

She turned and stared at him. Nick got up very slowly and softly. "I guess you two would rather—"

"Nick," Jeff said, "I didn't know you were here!"

"I'll see you later, kid," Nick said.

At the door Nick paused and Kathie came to him. She looked up, searching his face, and he saw it in her eyes. He had but to say the word and she would come with him. She'd tell Jeff. For the first time in his life Nick could have her for the asking. He tilted her chin with his fist.

"Goodbye, baby," he said.

THE night he finished the manuscript the sky outside was noisy, and the light over the desk was very poor so that Nick had to squint as he scratched the words on paper.

He was nearly at the end, and now, reflecting back, he realized that there was very much that he had not told. He had dwelt not on the suffering, nor even the horror; and

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he had strived to avoid that which was sensational; and yet he saw with bitter dismay that he had told only part of the story.

He knew that to chronicle even a portion of the things he had left out would take volumes. And what was more, in treating a theme of such profound importance it had perhaps been imprudent to describe in such detail the wedding of a blind naval officer to a beautiful girl.

But they were the ones who were really happy. For them peace had come; they would know long, warm days without gunfire. They were the lucky ones, and this was the point he had tried to make.

No, he was not sorry he had given so much space to a simple wedding scene; and as for his notes on the war itself, he saw again that this was only the beginning. He could not predict the future; and it was very likely that history itself would make little these few skirmishes he had reported with so much zeal. But he did not care. He had finished his job and there was in this moment a small sense of fulfillment. He rose and carefully put the bulky manuscript into his locker.

When he went outside the dark sky was quite clear, and starry. It was nearly dawn and pilots were streaming from the barracks, still half asleep. On the tarmac mechanics were warming up the fighter planes. Nick fitted his helmet over his head and pulled on his gloves. A major approached.

"Good morning, Captain. You're squadron leader here, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir."

The other nodded. "We've received information that enemy aircraft is approaching in great numbers." He paused. "You're to intercept them."

Nick nodded.

"It'll be a tough battle, I'm afraid. It's very likely that you'll be out-numbered."

"I understand," Nick said.

In the sky, leading the squadron, he glanced down on the burning ruins of Cristobal. Then he looked over the horizon. The sun was coming up and he saw a cloud of black specks that he knew to be enemy aircraft. His creased face hardened, and he kept watching the planes. Once he glanced at the insignia painted on the wing of his own ship. It was red, white and blue.

THE END

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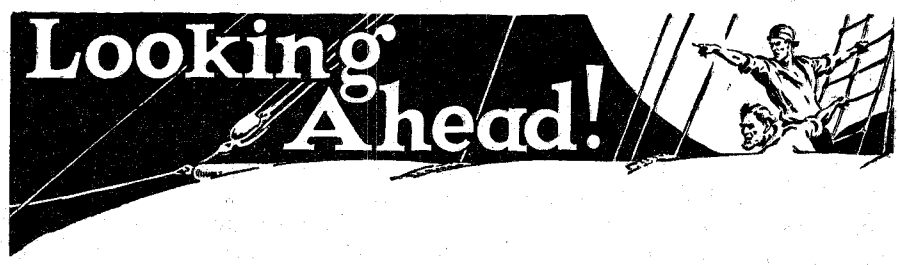


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**FRANCIS GOTT**

***Coming in Next Week's Argosy—May 24***

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WE'VE got a sort of mystery on our hands. A couple of weeks ago a Mr. H. Offord wrote in to say that the new-size ARGOSY is difficult to hide in textbooks and under pillows. We answered him; we gave his complaint the attention it deserved. But now it turns out that Mr. Offord isn't Mr. Offord, or else he is two people. It's quite confusing.

You see, Mr. Offord (or whoever he is) wrote us a second letter, which appears below. We answered this, and then we heard from *another* H. Offord, who said he had never written us before in his life. He had received one of our letters, and he was puzzled. So are we.

To increase the chaos, the first Offord put two addresses on his letters, one of which was the address of the second Offord. Now the second Offord says there isn't anybody around his region who would use his name. Well, somebody somewhere is doing it, or something.

Who, then, is the first Offord? He is a man given to whimsy and to rather extravagant prose, as his letters indicate. In fact, we're not sure what his latest communication is all about. Does the second Offord (apparently a level-headed man) have a prankish son? That might explain it. Or has some pixie taken pen in hand?

The last thing we want to do is to cause friction among the Offords, but it would calm us a good deal to learn what is going on. We are getting a little nervous; we thought we saw a small green man getting into our desk drawer this morning. He vanished before we could ask him what his name was.

Anyhow here is another letter from the first, or ARGOSY-under-a-pillow Offord.

### H. OFFORD

Your reply prompts me to hasten my sincerest apologies for not giving the changes made in ARGOSY the thought and study deserved.

The larger ARGOSY has its place midst the stars. I, for one, could conceive of no comparable way to incite, to whet the imagination, the ingenuity, the creative aspects of Young America. You must be persuaded to publicize the new ARGOSY over and over again.

Civic leaders everywhere should sing your praises. Think of the numerous eyesores that will be done away with. What could be more beautiful, as far-reaching, as pure and sweet as childish love, devotion, concern? What under the heavens will not be done to spare their loved ones any needless worry?

Are there any ends, any extremes to which Young America will not go to ward against, to prevent parents, guardians, loved ones from plunging into the quagmire of worry, its sordid, varied unpleasantries? The blessings of peace, of sacrifice, of tasks well done, and as in token what could be better at any age than an apple an ARGOSY devoid of worms and disconcertment?

I must insist, albeit, that the pillow is a thing of the past, in the respect heretofore mentioned. Sorry I cannot take the time nor space to prove this contention. On concluding, though, I can picture the enthusiasm of fresh-air advocates—windows yawning wide at night—twine manufacturers, to say nothing of gleeful glaziers, chiropractors, wire and mousetrap makers. In all I can think of no one who doesn't owe you a sincere and solemn vote of thanks for the new and added values of ARGOSY.

Shelter Island, N. Y. (or else
214 St. John's Pl., Brooklyn)

WELL, that's all very fine. We answered the letter in a suitable fashion, and promptly we received a note from the second Offord, who really does live at Shelter Island. Here he is.

### HARRY H. OFFORD

I presume you threw away the envelope of the letter which you thought came from me. If you still have it, see if it is postmarked Shelter Island. I know of no one here who would send a letter signed with my name, outside of myself.

I have read the *All-Story* and ARGOSY since 1920 but have never written anything about it to you. I have no kick to make to you or Mr. Roscoe.

Shelter Island, N. Y.

LET us for the moment leave the Offords. . . . We turn next to two readers who share a large enthusiasm for the stories of Charles Marquis Warren, particularly "Sometime Champ."

### THOMAS W. RICHARDS

When the name Charles M. Warren appears on the cover of ARGOSY, you can bet that there's always one fellow down here in Baltimore who stops at the news-stand for something more than a look around.

I don't know of any story that I've enjoyed more than "Sometime Champ," which appeared this week. One of the fine things that Mr. Warren puts into his work is an accurate background, which shows he knows his subject. "Sometime Champ" appealed to me even more than his other works, since I not only know Baltimore, Pen Mar and other sections mentioned, but am employed in the salesbook industry.

We, in the salesbook business, realize that Mr. Warren evidently put quite a lot of time into research, and several of our employees are already on their way to the newsstands since the subject is of appeal to everyone working here.

"Sometime Champ" is one of those stories that gets more and more interesting as it goes along. It is packed with suspense, the characters are neatly drawn, and the reading is smooth.

Mr. Warren is number one on the hit parade here. May we have more of his excellent work in the near future?

Baltimore, Md.

VERY soon there will be more Warren in ARGOSY, a splendid new serial, exciting enough and long enough to satisfy both Mr. Richards and his fellow enthusiast



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| 6.00-16 | 3.15 | 1.45 |
| 6.00-17 | 2.85 | 1.15 |
| 30x6.00-18 | 2.85 | 1.15 |
| 31x6.00-19 | 2.85 | 1.15 |
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### CHARLES F. HOESCH

I spend practically half my time reading magazines, but about the best story I have ever come across was in your recent issue, called "Sometime Champ". It was great. Thought you might like a comment.
Baltimore, Md.

LAST week there was a military man sniping away at Mr. Robert P. Crawford, who got himself into something by criticizing the marksmanship in ARGOSY. This week the Marines take over; one of them, firing at long distance from off-shore Cuba, chooses Mr. Crawford for target.

### ROY C. SEARS

We have read with great amusement the recent letter written by Robert P. Crawford the self-styled expert.

Mr. Crawford should join the U. S. Marines and see just how big the bull's-eye is at five hundred (500) yds. Maybe we have been getting gypped, but we have been required to shoot at a bull's-eye merely twenty inches in diameter instead of the one that the expert, Mr. Crawford, so kindly gave us the dimensions of.

We should like very much to challenge Mr. Crawford to produce any target up to, and including the one used at one thousand (1000) yds., because we have never seen any target with a six-foot bull's-eye and we have shot out quite a few V5's. As any shooter knows, a V5 is merely a ten-inch circle inside of a twenty-inch bull's-eye.
Guantanamo Bay, Cuba

WE FEEL that it's necessary to say a word or two about Mr. David Vern, the author of that fine short novel "Bitter Voyage." Mr. Vern has appeared in ARGOSY before, under the name David V. Reed. It seems only fair to announce this, so that Reed-Vern will get all the credit that is due him. So David Vern is not a newcomer; and David V. Reed has not vanished from our pages.


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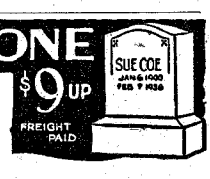


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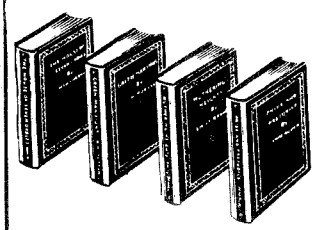

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